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Dr. Vivek Bhattacharya

FAMOUS INDIAN SAGES THEIR IMMORTAL MESSAGES

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DEDICATED TO

Late Rajendra Mohan Bhattacharya my father and
Late Radharani Devi my mother

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FAMOUS INDIAN SAGES
THEIR IMMORTAL MESSAGES

REFERENCE BOOK

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M.A., Ph.D.

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PREACE

This is the first of the three volumes on Famous Indian Sages, their Immortal Messages. In this volume, which is devoted to only twenty six out of one hundred and ten Saints of India, I have pleasure in depicting the profiles and messages of sages from all regions and religions in India.

The Saints have been discussed chronologically according to their dates. In some cases it was difficult to get their exact dates inspite of best of efforts. May be, some great saints have been left out. Sages like Vyas, Valmiki, Kapila, Narada, Vashishtha, Vishwamitra, Sanaka and many other mythological saints have not been included in this volume.

I have tried to highlight mainly the lives, path of god realisation and messages of these great Masters. The task is restricted only to present a bird's eye view of the historic lives of these great path-finders. Each one deserves volumes to describe. Only broad outlines of their activities, their movements and treatment of spiritual experiences and experiments have been recorded. The different systems and faiths have not been categorised intentionally. The main purpose of the publication is to show the harmony, co-existence and secular spirit of Indian culture.

I have tried to get material directly from the organisations set up by the different systems of thought. I want to record here the deep feeling of gratitude to all these religious organisations belonging to different regions and sects. I have tried to show the common trends of their thoughts and avoided controversies. Controversies are redundant.

Shrutirvivinna smritirevavinna
Na eko muniryasyo bachah pramanam
Dharmasya tatvam nihitang guhayang
Mahajano jena gatah sa panthah

The *srutis* are different, *smritis* are different. The systems are different, so are the treatments. There is no sage whose

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words are fool-proof. The real secrets of Truth lie in dark caves only. The paths followed by greatmen, are the real ways.

None is wrong. The different paths lead to the same goal-god realisation.

I am grateful to innumerable friends and learned colleagues for their valuable suggestions. I have tried to present excerpts from the original writings of the saints in their own regional languages. I had to depend on phonetics. I beg to be corrected by generous readers.

Words fail to express my gratitude to learned Finance Minister Prof. Pranab Mukherjee who took keen interest in the progress of the work. He inspired me the most at all stages. It was during my official assignment with him that I started the work and right from beginning he had inspired me in this noble task. Even his learned father Shri K.K. Mukherjee (who was Private Secretary to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore) and young son Abhijit involved themselves actively and encouraged me in my arduous task.

I must record my gratitude to the learned Swami Ranganathananda Head of the Ramakrishna Mission, Hyderabad, Swami Tapasyananda, Head of Ramakrishna Mission, Madras, Swami Swahananda, Head of Vedanta society, California, Shri K.K. Birla the scholarly industrial magnate, Shri H.Y. Sharda Prasad, the learned Information Advisor to the Prime Minister, the deeply devoted Shri Jagadesh Rishi of Vishwa Dharma Prateesthan, Shri P.A. Sangma, the young promising national leader and Minister at the centre for the constant interest and learned guidance they extended from time to time and inspired me to complete this marathon manuscript of more than 2,500 pages. But for their constant queries for completion of the manuscript perhaps it would have not been possible to finish the task. Shri Birla also suggested inclusion of some Saints' name from Southern and Northern India.

May the blessings of all these great sages shower on all my readers the divine bliss, peace and prosperity!

The kind readers' suggestions for inclusion anything fresh will be welcome.

January 11, 1982.

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first of a series of three volumes on FAMOUS INDIAN SAGES, THEIR IMMORTAL MESSAGES. This will cover the profiles and messages of one hundred and ten Saints of India right from Sukhdev to Ma Ananda Mayee and Satya Sai Baba.

The basic characteristic of Indian Culture is its happy blending with deep spiritual leanings. This spiritual value in life has very much influenced our daily routine. It is only in the absence of these values in life that we realise their real significance. In utter bewilderment, helplessness and frustration and despair, we look to something to draw our inspiration from and try to draw strength from the great Power House which we normally leave aside when we are absorbed deeply in the otherwise artificial enjoyments of life.

Indian philosophy has a universal appeal. Her mystics had wider visions and outlook liberal. She accepts all that is noble and sublime. No Indian sage has ever expressed a word of hatred or disapproval of another. No country had the benefit of so many spiritual experiments—so many religions in so many regions. India stands unique with secret of heavenly bliss.

These eternal messages of India have come down to us from great sages and seers who have brought them to earth by their self-realisations. They first got themselves enlightened through a very difficult process of self-purification, mortification and intense meditation. It was not an easy way. They had to undergo deep penance. Many of them never returned from their long journey to tell us about their experiences. The few who returned, gave us immortal messages of Truth and Love. They are simply supreme. It is the synthesis of these diverse versions that forms the core of Indian Culture.

This undying spirit of Indian Culture has accepted unreservedly the highest thoughts from all sects of philosophers and thinkers irrespective of caste, creed or sect. Her culture is

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the happy conglomeration of different varieties. It is the happy synthesis of so many races who came from outside and got settled here permanently. They all came in "mad exultation, singing songs of victory". They came from long distances crossing deserts and mountains. They never returned. The symphony of Indian Culture echo their varied melodies. No doubt the World Poet Rabindranath Tagore described this great land as the *Holi Pilgrimage*. India symbolises the harmony of varied thoughts. It represents a rare example of unity in diversity. India is a pilgrimage to all explorers of Truth.

In the words of Rabindranath Tagore:

On the shores of *Bharat*,
Where men of all races have come together,
Awake, O my Mind!
Standing here with outstreched arms,
I send my salutations to the God of Humanity,
And in solemn chant sing His praises.
At whose call no one knows
Came floating streams of men
And merged into the Sea of Bharat.
The Aryan, the Non-Aryan, the Dravidian,
The Huns, the Pathans and the Moghuls—
They all have merged here into one body.
Today the West has opened its doors,
And from thence come gifts.
Giving and taking,
All will be welcome on the shores of *Bharat*
Where men of all races have come together.

The call of the unknown, the search for eternal Truth made Princes leave their royal palaces and the attraction of the throne. That was possible only in India. They have conquered fears. "On the shores of *Bharat*, men of all races have come together". They gave us the message of *abhih*—fearlessness. It is from this great Power House India has been drawing all her spiritual strength to fight against injustice, humiliation and stand by the oppressed and the suppressed throughout the globe.

This priceless treasure of Indian spiritualism has been giving tremendous inspiration for self-reliance and inner search.

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The more we learn about it the more we understand the abyss of our ignorance and futility of our glamour and insolence of power and mighty greed to rule over the rest.

It is only the ignorant one, the less enlightened who would like to be restricted to his narrow cell. As Tagore wrote so beautifully :

Here one day in the hearts of men
The message of the One resounded.
In the fire of 'tapasya' all differences were forgotton,
And the many forged into one.
Round that fire of sacrifice,
We all have to meet with bowed heads and unite,
On the shores of *Bharat*,
Where men of all races have come together.

Whenever there had been signs of exploitation of the poor or the meek by the rich or the strong, these Godmen through their deep insight and self-mortification gathered spiritual inner strength and appeared on the scene to protect the weaker ones. Mahavir gave us the message of equality and non-violence. Buddha gave us the message of tolerance and service to humanity. Both challenged the existing mighty rule of the superstitious rituals depriving the rest from spiritual pursuits. They were the first to open the door of divinity to all and sundry.

Sankaracharya had bound the whole country from Kashmir to Kanyakumari in the emotional unity of thought. His is the highest priority to renunciation. As the founder of *Dasnami* sects he is the fore runner of all later saints.

The *Sufi* Saints gave us the highest thoughts of the Prophet-Universal Brotherhood of Man and paved the way for the *Bhakti* movements to follow two hundred years later.

The Saints of *Bhakti* era came with a powerful wave that flooded the entire country. It was a strong challenge against age-old caste system prevalent in all parts of the country. Ramananda, Kabir, Ravidas, Vallabhacharya, Guru Nanak, Dadu and the host of saints brought a silent revolution in the whole social set up. There was a novelty in the new movement.

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The spiritual leadership so long limited only to the restricted few was taken over as a matter of right through spiritual self-enlightenment, by people from different strata of society. A weaver's son who sang to the glory of the Great attracted millions to follow him. A cobbler's son attained the Divine Light and initiated to discipleship a queen in the palace.

Guru Nanak came with message of universal brotherhood of man. He left a permanent imprint in the history of Indian Culture.

Mahapurush Sankar Deva of Assam came with a new message of spiritual patriotism. "The whole of *Bharatvarsha* is my land", said the spiritual saint more than five hundred years ago.

Be it the Saint Musician Thyagaraja in the South or Ramprased or Sri Chaitanya in the East and Namadeva in the South West, these Seers definitely contributed to emotional integration of the whole country. All these saints preached and practised secular thoughts. Whether Hindus or Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, or Buddhists, Christians or again *Saiva* or *Shakta* or *Vaishnava*, all of them had a common message—a message of universal love for Man.

The profiles and messages of some of these sages may give us a new meaning to life. It may inspire us for self-introspection and self-evaluation which is so necessary in society to understand each other better. More work on such saintly people will add to better emotional integration which is most necessary today.

Let us hope the message of these great Masters will reach people beyond our land, mountains and seas. Let all get the benefit of the wisdom and and message of our seers. Let us hope the fruit will be enjoyed by all. Let me add again the beautiful words of Tagore :

Because of the *tapasya* of countless ages past,
This creeper has bloomed on the lap of earth today.
This picture of joy lay hidden in the folds of the unknown.

I shall consider my efforts fruitful if the book can give joy even to one person. I must thank a large number of scholars

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SUKADEVA

The earliest Saint

Among the earliest path finders known in Indian history was Vyasdeva. He was known by different attributes. One of them was Veda Vyas. He is supposed to have divided the *Vedas* into four parts. So he is described as *Vedabibhagkarta*. An ancient sage, he is also known as *Krishnadvaipayan*. His father's name was Parashar and mother's Satyavati.

Sage Vyas wanted a pure, learned, ideal son. For this he propritiated all deities, particularly *Vishnu*. The result of his long penance and deep meditation was a boon. In due course Vyasdeva was blessed with a son fully enlightened, ideal son, Sukadeva. According to stories in the *Puran*, a mythology, Sukadeva could not touch earth because of *maya* (worldly attachment). His father got worried. The son would live only in the mother's womb. Vyas came to know the reason in his meditation. So he prayed to Lord *Vishnu* to remove world attachment from earth for a short time. The great Saint took this opportunity to lay his step on earth at that moment. That is the story of this great sage's birth. Sukadeva was the symbol of renunciation.

The Saint had enlightened knowledge even before his birth due to the achievement in his previous births. Right in the mother's womb he had become a completely unattached pure soul.

The child would, as a matter of habit go to the forest and sit there in deep meditation. As he was sitting there one day he had a vision : "No spiritual experiment ever succeeds without a proper guide." This guide, the *Guru* is as important as God Himself. The devotee first must get full training under such a guide and gain spiritual realisations.

Sukadeva did not know anybody who could give him proper spiritual guidance. Being already an enlightened soul he would not like to approach any ordinary monk either. The path finder must be a knowledgeable person himself, with

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sufficient experience, knowledge, background and real enlightenment. Only then he could take up the task of showing path to the noble hearted young *Yogin*.

How to get a *Guru* ? Why should he run after any body? In his own family there were so many saints.

It was a family known for their search for real truth. Vyasdeva, himself an enlightened soul, spent all his time in exploring truth. His *Vedanta Sutra* is universally acclaimed as a masterpiece in Indian philosophy. His illustrious father, the enlightened sage Parashar was equally respected. It seems, although much enlightened, they had yet to achieve perfection in the art of God-realisation. Their contribution in the realm of mysticism had been really unique. Sukadeva, was an enlightened soul right from his birth. He is, from that angle, considered to be the most important character among the saints, representing spirit of renunciation and non-attachment. Later saints tried to imbibe his characteristics. Till today, he is considered to be the most ideal monk; among millions he has been singled out by all schools of thought. But what about a *Guru* ? Where is he ?

Maharshi Vyasdeva started teaching the son himself. He started giving him wise divine sermons. Finally he wanted the little one to get in touch with Rajarshi Janak for higher enlightenment. Janaka was not only an able ruler, he was supposed to be an embodiment of spiritual knowledge as well. Maharshi suggested his name to his son as his *Guru*.

King Janak had attained such a high stage of identification with the Infinity that he had lost all worldly feelings or attachments. Although a king, Janak did not have any feelings of pleasure of pain for his body. That was why he was popularly known also as *Videha* which literally means "one without any feeling for his body". He did not know what lust or luxury meant. He would always consider only his soul to exist. For him the body was meaningless.

When Maharshi Vyas guided the young child to approach the king for higher knowledge he resisted. He did not appreciate the idea of being a disciple of a royal preceptor. He did not particularly welcome the idea because of his own lineage. His father was a known learned sage. His grand father too was equally famous as a seer. Why, of all persons, should he sit at

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the feet of a person who enjoys the luxuries of life in a palace? The child hesitated but the enlightened father insisted on his sending him to Janak. The little one protested in vain and finally was sent to the royal preceptor.

It was not so easy for Sukadeva to reach the palace. He was stopped at the gate by the guards. They found him too small to understand the high ideas of their king who was known all the world over for his learning. They simply would not allow him to get in.

Sukadeva too had his vanity. He was proud to be the son of the great Saint Vyasdeva. He explained in vain his background. His pleadings had no effect. With due consideration to his age, the guards just offered him a seat along with them.

King Janak knew that Sukadeva was to reach his palace. He was expecting the son of Vyas to reach him. But when he did not find him in his palace he made enquiries about the young one.

Young Sukadeva sat on that seat offered to him by the guards for three days and three nights.

When the king asked his court people to check up whether any young boy had come to meet him, the same fellows who did not care to listen to his repeated appeals to lead him to the king, suddenly became over enthusiastic about his whereabouts. The poor boy was given a fine bath, a nice dress, then led him to the king.

The king first ordered them to lead him to a comfortable well decorated room. They were too glad to lead him to a well furnished apartment in the royal palace. Beautiful damsels were put on duty to look after the young Saint. All arrangements were made to offer him the best of food. The ministers and personal advisers of the king peeped in now and then to ask him about his welfare and got confirmed that he was happy. Every body stood in attention to look after him.

The young *Yogin*, on the other hand, did not like all these arrangements. To be frank, he was confused. How could his father so vastly learned, and himself an ideal sage, send him to such a place? He must have been familiar with the regalia of a royal palace. How could he think of selecting such a person as a preceptor?

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Eight days and nights passed on like this. The *yogin* completely unattached to any thing surrounding him went on with his usual routine of meditation. All the time a horried picture haunted him. This was the picture which the young man saw while entering the royal palace. "King Janak, knowing that Sukadeva was proud of his renunciation, and that he considered King Janak as man of sensual pleasure created a miracle for him. When Sukadeva entered the king's room, he saw that the king was having one leg massaged by a beautiful woman, while his other leg was placed on a hot oven. Seeing this, Sukadeva realised what a great mistake he had been making all the time, by regarding King Janak a person given to sensual pleasure, while he was actually a great *Mahatma*."

(Huzur Mahararaj Sawan Singhji—*Tales of the Mystic East*, p. 50)

This was not enough.

The king wanted to test the fresh disciple further. For this he took the help yet of another miracle. An errand boy suddenly appeared before the king with all excitement and broke a sad news. He said the whole town was under flame. The town suddenly caught fire and hundreds of persons were getting killed. The king said, "God's will will be done. We have nothing to do."

The same boy came again and said the royal court was under fire.

Again King Janak repeated the same "God's will cannot be resisted," he proclaimed.

The boy came again and excitedly said that the fire had spread upto the royal palace itself. And yet the King remained calm and composed. He simply said, "Thy wilt be done O Lord !" Sukadeva was sure the King was a most idealist dreamer. He thought to himself that "the king was a great fool, because he kept on repeating that it was God's will but did nothing to prevent the fire from doing more damage !"

Janak knew everything. He was fully versed in the art of thought reading.

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Suddenly Sukadeva collected his little bundle of *lota kambal* and wanted to run away.

King Janak caught him by the arm and said, "Look, all my wealth and possessions have been burnt to ashes and I have not bothered about them. Now, when the fire has reached the palace, you have taken hold of this small bundle of your possessions with the intention of running away. The cost of all you have here would not be more than a pittance. Just realise, who exactly is the greater renouncer—you or I ?"

King Janak wanted Sukadeva's ego to be crushed totally. As long as ego is there, nobody, however, powerful he may be, can go even a step ahead spiritually.

In the beautifully decorated luxurious royal apartment Sukadeva was only recapitulating all these scenes. He was simply dazed. He had yet to discover the real self of his *Guru*. When eight days were over Sukadeva was called by the King.

King Janak was fully satisfied with the demeanour of the young lad. He was not least affected by the lust and luxuries of life. He could not be allowed by the beauty of flesh and other earthly attractions. The King noticed no change in Sukadeva. He looked exactly the same as he presented himself before the king eight days ago. When he reached the royal court King Janak was seated, as usual, on his throne. The royal court was flooded with usual music, dance and hilarious laughter of exuberance. Joy in abundance excelled everything else. The King asked Sukadeva how he liked the palace. The unattached saint, still expecting his first lessons from the King, explained that he was well looked after.

Then a real test came. It was a tough one.

King Janak asked the court to have special functions in the royal court in honour of the young saint, son of a distinguished sage of the kingdom. The King told him, "look, this is all in your honour. Enjoy yourself thoroughly."

Then he presented him with a cup of milk, full to the brim.

King Janak asked Sukadeva to make seven rounds of the royal court.

"Look here my dear. Not a drop of milk must spill out of the cup. If it does, your head will be off your shoulder'."

The young saint then left for his seven rounds. When he

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finally completed his seven rounds and stood before the king both were very happy. Not a drop of milk could spill out of the cup. He was so cautious about his movements.

The king then asked his young guest, "how did you enjoy the merriments, the dances of the beautiful damsels, the music and the entire arrangment made specially in your honour?"

Sukadeva said, "Sir, I know nothing about them. I had hardly any time or occasion even to spare a glance at them. I had to put full concentration with my full attention only to the cup of milk!

King Janak gave him the first lesson and told him, "Look my dear Sukadeva that is exactly how I have to run my kingdom. All the routine works of a king have to be attended to by a king. Otherwise he is not worthy of his salt. But the whole mind will have to be devoted only to one thing and that is God realisation."

That is exactly why when you entered my room the other day I made you see one of my legs put on the lap of a beautiful woman and the other one on a burning furnace. Honestly speaking there was no such thing. That was only a miracle to haunt your mind over earthly things—pleasure and pain of a life of a king!

Sukadeva was dazed. A new window opened before him. A gust of fresh air welcomed the young *yogin*. He realized at once how practical King Janak was in his approach to spirituality and the ordinary life of a King.

Sukadeva was the most ideal among the monks in India. The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* introduced Sukadeva as "The narrator of the *Bhagavata* and son of Vyas, regarded as one of India's ideal monks."

(*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—foreword by Aldous Huxlay, p. 1039)

Sukadeva was the hero before Swami Vivekanada. In comparison to all other sages and seers it was only Sukadeva who had the highest realisation of unattachment before whom "the whole world was a mere child's game." Sri Ramakrishna used to fondly describe Swami Vivekananda as "my Sukadeva." He was a living symbol of the message of *Bhagavat Geeta*. It is

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Suddenly Sukadeva collected his little bundle of *lota kambal* and wanted to run away.

King Janak caught him by the arm and said, "Look, all my wealth and possessions have been burnt to ashes and I have not bothered about them. Now, when the fire has reached the palace, you have taken hold of this small bundle of your possessions with the intention of running away. The cost of all you have here would not be more than a pittance. Just realise, who exactly is the greater renouncer—you or I ?"

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King Janak was fully satisfied with the demeanour of the young lad. He was not least affected by the lust and luxuries of life. He could not be allowed by the beauty of flesh and other earthly attractions. The King noticed no change in Sukadeva. He looked exactly the same as he presented himself before the king eight days ago. When he reached the royal court King Janak was seated, as usual, on his throne. The royal court was flooded with usual music, dance and hilarious laughter of exuberance. Joy in abundance excelled everything else. The King asked Sukadeva how he liked the palace. The unattached saint, still expecting his first lessons from the King, explained that he was well looked after.

Then a real test came. It was a tough one.

King Janak asked the court to have special functions in the royal court in honour of the young saint, son of a distinguished sage of the kingdom. The King told him, "look, this is all in your honour. Enjoy yourself thoroughly."

Then he presented him with a cup of milk, full to the brim.

King Janak asked Sukadeva to make seven rounds of the royal court.

"Look here my dear. Not a drop of milk must spill out of the cup. If it does, your head will be off your shoulder'."

The young saint then left for his seven rounds. When he

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finally completed his seven rounds and stood before the king both were very happy. Not a drop of milk could spill out of the cup. He was so cautious about his movements.

The king then asked his young guest, "how did you enjoy the merriments, the dances of the beautiful damsels, the music and the entire arrangment made specially in your honour?"

Sukadeva said, "Sir, I know nothing about them. I had hardly any time or occasion even to spare a glance at them. I had to put full concentration with my full attention only to the cup of milk!

King Janak gave him the first lesson and told him, "Look my dear Sukadeva that is exactly how I have to run my kingdom. All the routine works of a king have to be attended to by a king. Otherwise he is not worthy of his salt. But the whole mind will have to be devoted only to one thing and that is God realisation."

That is exactly why when you entered my room the other day I made you see one of my legs put on the lap of a beautiful woman and the other one on a burning furnace. Honestly speaking there was no such thing. That was only a miracle to haunt your mind over earthly things—pleasure and pain of a life of a king!

Sukadeva was dazed. A new window opened before him. A gust of fresh air welcomed the young *yogin*. He realized at once how practical King Janak was in his approach to spirituality and the ordinary life of a King.

Sukadeva was the most ideal among the monks in India. The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* introduced Sukadeva as "The narrator of the *Bhagavata* and son of Vyas, regarded as one of India's ideal monks."

(*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—foreword by Aldous Huxlay, p. 1039)

Sukadeva was the hero before Swami Vivekanada. In comparison to all other sages and seers it was only Sukadeva who had the highest realisation of unattachment before whom "the whole world was a mere child's game." Sri Ramakrishna used to fondly describe Swami Vivekananda as "my Sukadeva." He was a living symbol of the message of *Bhagavat Geeta*. It is

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said in the Holy Scriptures, the Lord is giving the enlightened saint the highest tribute by specifically mentioning that he was the only soul on earth who understood the real meaning of the *Bhagavat Geeta*.

Ahang vedmi Suko betti Vyaso betti na betti ba. Only I know the real meaning of the *Geeta*. The only other person who knows it, is Suka. Maharshi Vyas may or may not know it.

About the God realisation of Sukadeva Sri Ramakrishna said, "Sukadeva tested only a drop of that ocean *Brahman*—consciousness. He saw and heard the rumblings of the waves of the ocean, but he did not dive into it.

("*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 300)

But the Saint of Dakshineswar immediately explains why Sukadeva did not dive deep. Had he dived deep he would have never returned among people to teach mankind. He said "According to some, Sukadeva saw and touched the ocean of *Brahman*; he did not dive into it. That is why he could return to the world and impart religious instruction. According to others, he returned to the world of name and form, after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, for the purpose of teaching others. He had to recite the *Bhagavata* to King Parikshit and had to teach people in various ways: therefore God did not destroy his 'I' altogether. God kept in him the ego of knowledge."

(*Ibid* pp. 208-09)

Sukadeva was "a *Brahmarshi*. He was not a mere *jnani*; he was the very embodiment of *jnana*, divine knowledge. Whom do I call a *jnani*? A man who has attained knowledge and has done so without much effort. Sukadeva was the very image of knowledge, in other words, a form of concentrated knowledge. He attained knowledge spontaneously, without any labour." This knowledge generates spontaneously. This is not ordinary knowledge. This is real light.

Again, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Sukadeva was absorbed in *samadhi—nirvikalpa samadhi, jada samadhi*. Since Suka was to recite *Bhagavata* to King Parikshit the Lord sent the sage Narada to him. Narada saw him seated like an inert thing, absolutely unconscious of the world around him. Thereupon Narada sang four couplets on the beauty of *Hari*, to the accompaniment of *vina*. While the first couplet was being sung the hair on Suka's

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body stood on end. Next he shed tears, for he saw the form of God, the embodiment of spirit, within himself, in his heart. Thus Sukadeva saw the form of God even after *jada samadhi*. He was an *Isvarkoti*."

Sukadeva did not attain knowledge through ordinary *sadhana*. Like Sukadeva, Narada also had the knowledge of *Brahman* but he retained *Bhakti* in order to teach people." One had *jnan*, the other *bhakti*. Both are necessary for God realisation.

His main purpose to appear on earth was to inculcate a true spirit of renunciation and service to man, that represent the true essence of Indian philosophy and culture.

He introduced '*Gopi Prem*" to the *Krishna cult* and presented this divine pure attachment to God as the only way to have God-realisation. Among all the Saints, past and present, Sukadeva represents the most ideal character and it is till today considered to be the symbol of purity. Like Sankara, he did not find any *sampradaya* or sect. Perhaps that was not necessary because he is treated as an ideal for all sects.

Sukadeva had given description of real *Gopi Prem*. In a brilliant speech on "Great Men of India" Swami Vivekananda observed in Madras how the real meaning had been mutilated by some impure minds and illiterate people of our land. Describing the pure love for *Krishna* by the *Gopis*, Sukadeva had created a new form of devotion. Swamiji asked the critics how could the divine love be anything but supreme when it had been described by the "ever pure Saint, son of Maharshi Vyas, Brahmarshi Sukadeva"? As long as the heart is not clear; it cannot get any glimpse of divine light.

(*Complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. V)

Sukadeva was the ideal of Swami Vivekananda's life. Sri Ramakrishna would always describe this most favourite discriple with Sukadeva and comment "just like Sukadeva attachment could never touch Naren."

One of Swami Vivekananda's disciples tells us how the great modern saint would get lost in ecstasy describing the great qualities of Sukadeva. His whole face would beam in brightness and he would get absorbed in the ocean of divine bliss."

(*Complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IX, p. 276)

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BHAGAWAN MAHAVIRA

(590 BC-510 BC)

The Himalayas is the birth place of some of the highest thoughts of the world. It has been the citadel of the saints who spent their lives in meditation on its lap. Among the ancient saints and sages the most living one is Bhagawan Mahavira, the prince who left his royal robes in search of Truth. He got enlightened himself and wanted to share his bliss with the world. His teachings are giving peace and solace to millions throughout the world. Jainism is a living religion even today.

It is really a remarkable feature to note that more than 2500 years ago an Indian saint founded a religion of man on equality and fraternity. He introduced a system of wishing each other by a *mantra* which literally meant —"be equal". He not only stood for non-violence and peace he stood for tolerance and justice.

It has been truly observed, Lord Mahavira, "set his self ablaze till he became a mighty torch. He reinforced his doctrine of non-violence, that non-violence is the noblest path, with another—Stoicism is the noblest path. Non-violence of one who is not endowed with stoicism is the non-violence of the timorous. On the other hand the stoicism of one who is not blessed with non-violence is going to convert into conceit. Timorousness and conceit are, both, sinful. Mahavira would commend neither course." Muni Nathmal says, "in his philosophy, human equability serves as the peopelling force of human achievement. His career is one of immense forbearance. The sufferings crumbled at his touch, not he at the touch of sufferings. Human might may be canalised to cause injury or as to suffer it. Apotheosisor of the animal might may torture others and such a one is not blessed with forbearance. One

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who has the true faith in one's own might, can bear suffering but cannot cause the same to others."

India is a most fascinating country with a lofty tradition which surpasses the peak of Everest. It is only in India that one is amazed to find princes leaving their royal robes and palaces and renounce the worldly pleasure in search of eternal truth. It is only in India where a calm cave was preferred to a royal throne. That is the secret of her soil. Renunciation is the first and last word of Indian philosophy.

That was the story of Prince Vardhaman later on known throughout the world as Mahavira. He founded the Jain religion, basic work for which was started much earlier by twenty three *Tirthankaras*. Mahavira was the twenty fourth of the Tirthankaras.

Mahavira was born in the Sixth century B.C. at Vaishala, modern village Basrah, twenty four miles from Patna. During those days it was a flourishing town being the capital of Videha. It is in the district of Muzaffarpur. The little village has become a pilgrimage to people who have thirst for Truth and love for light. They throng to this village from far and wide.

Mahavira's father was Siddhartha and mother Trisala. They belonged to a warrior class. *Kshatriya*, to be exact. Vardhaman was married to beautiful Yoshoda and had a sweet daughter Priyadarshana.

It is said that the mother had a vision before the birth of Mahavira. Both Siddhartha and Trisala were keenly devoted to their son. One night, it seems, Trisala was asleep at midnight found before her eyes one by one fourteen pictures in the *Nidganda Dharma Mandal*. These pictures are described as highly auspicious. She told the husband about the dream. Siddhartha was stunned. She said that first she saw an elephant which was white in colour *Svetahasti*, then *Jyotimoi Balivarda* and then suddenly she saw that a pearl-white lion jumped on her leg—*Subhravarna Sinha*. Then she found Devi Kamala at the peak of the Himalayas with *leela kamal* in her hands and she was surrounded by vast wealth. Siddhartha was excited. "Tell me dear, after that what else did you see?" "Yes", the wife Trisala said, "I found by and by *Mandaramala*

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then the Moon, the Sun, *Dhwaja*, *Kumbha*, lotus pond and an ocean of milk. Then there was a bright mountaian with soft light which looked like a hillock of diamonds and pearls. I also saw the flame of fire."

Being a learned and devoted person Siddhartha was happy that the wife had such a nice dream. "You are going to be the mother of a God's son who will be all-powerful and who will found a new religious faith." Next day Siddhartha consulted an astrologer and told him the whole story. The whole dream was analysed and the astrologer told him that they were going to have a very important personality as their son, *Dikpal Purusha*, a person with unsurmountable personality and all-conquering confidence. He will be the leader of millions and will build up a very large empire or he will be a Jina who will conquer the three worlds, one of the greatest men of the world. This is also described in *Kalpasutra* 4 (81) in details. Siddhartha's joy knew no bound.

It was the end of the 6th Century B.C. It was the month of festival. The full moon was to appear two days later. But it appeared prematurely somewhere else. It appeared on the lap of Trisala two days before the full moon night, a new child, Vardhamana was born. Trisala was already knowing who this child was and thinking in her mind about the future of the sweet one. This was her second son. The eldest son was Nandiwaran who was an affectionate brother and another pious person in the family. It was a very happy year for the whole area and Vaishala was full of smiles because Vaishala people were having a ten-day festival on account of the birth of the child. The harvest was rich and the fields were green. People had foodgrains in abundance. They were all exceedingly happy. The kingdom became prosperous. So Siddhartha called this boy Vardhaman which means prosperity.

During those days there was complete democaracy. The small kingdoms like Magadh, Vaishala, Avanti were all living in peace side by side. The leadership was held by an elected one and it was his duty to look after safety and defence of the areas. Mahavira's father Siddhartha was the head of one such principality. He was quite powerful as a ruler. He was popular and was known for his high moral character and skill in the art of administration and above all a deeply religious person.

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He was a leader of the local principalities. The great German scholar Herman Jakopi who was an authority on the Jain religion tells us about the birth place of Mahavira. He says it was Kondagram, near Vaishala and it was a small town and he says the father of the Saint was not perhaps more than a mere feudal lord. It is perhaps not true that Siddhartha was a very strong ruler. It is not necessary to argue about the pomp and power of the father. It is definitely true that he was a very well-to-do person if not a very powerful king, he was at least a big ruler. In the Jaina literature also Siddhartha has been described as a person belonging to the warrior class and described as Kshatriya and the mother Trisala has been described as Kshatriyani. It is interesting to note that nowhere it has been described Trisala either as devi or rani. Nowhere has it also been said that any other small principality was under the jurisdiction of Siddhartha. They were all of equal status. It is quite natural that perhaps Siddhartha was not a king. He was perhaps only just a feudal lord. Siddhartha's wife Trisala was the sister of Chetaka, the king of Vaishali. Chetaka's daughters were married to the rajas of the minor principalities of Magadh, Avanti and Sindhusouvi. So, from the point of view of relations Siddhartha was very well-connected. He had a very high social status. There is no doubt that he was a very popular ruling feudal lord if not a king, and it was not a very ordinary thing for Vardhamana to leave the royal life and the lust of princely life and join the order of ascetics.

There was a very congenial atmosphere of religious discourses and discussions in Siddhartha's house which was frequently visited by the *Niggantha Shramanas* or the ascetics. They were all selfless monks whose only desire in life was to have salvation in life. So it was a very great opportunity for the young child to listen to the teachings of these learned ascetics. His yearning for exploring the truth in person became gradually more and more acute. Day by day His longing for leading an ascetic life became obvious to Him.

Young Vardhamana was a very strong person. He was very bold and sharp in intellect. Once when he was playing with his friends and playmates, the children were all frightened by the appearance of a cobra. They all ran helter-skelter. They all left, only Vardhamana was left alone there. He caught hold of the

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cobra by the tail and whirled round the whole body physically and threw it far away in a forest.

Siddhartha took much care adout the child's education and he kept no stone unturned for his intellectual development. At quite a young age Vardhamana was married to a very beautiful princess who was the daughter of the king of Samarabir, a feudal lord. Her name was Yashoda. She was a paragon of beauty and highly qualified and accomplished. They had a daughter whose name was Anavidya, known also by another name Priyadarshana in the Jaina literature.

Vardhamana, however, had no interest in materialistic way of life. He was not fascinated by the beautiful women in the palace or the royal throne. All the time he was thinking of the unseen rays of spiritual force whieh was at the root of all these huge magnificent creation. His heart was bleeding for exploring this truth Himself. He did not want to depend on a second-hand information. The spiritual life that the palace was leading and the ascetics life created in the palace was a great contributing factor in preparing Vardhamana for a bigger and nobler life.

The lust for life was not restricted to a palace any more. His desire was much higher and it was a great thirst for the eternal light. He must get enlightened. It was His only motto in life and He was prepared Himself mentally for it. He was only waiting for a final day when he could leave aside everything else. It was a winter afternoon. The dew drops on the green royal garden was yet to drop. The garden was full with floral beauty fully blossomed. The royal dress was thrown aside. The young prince was initiated. He took a new vow that in His mind, in His speech, in His body, He will devote himself only to non-violence, truth, Brahmacharya and will not have any lust for anybody's property. He will look to pleasure and pain, life and death at par. He will have no attachment to life. He renounced everything just in one stroke of thought. Vardhamana left the palace and started his long journey just like a *Niggantha Shramana.* He had no bindings, He had no moorings; He was only an ascetic. He had only a piece of cloth on His body and after some thirteen months He threw away that also. He gave that to a beggar. He became completely naked—*Digambara.* That was the first step towards complete renunciation. It was a physical renunciation. He left out all the lusts in

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life. It would now be in *Asana* and *Upasana* that the ascetic would be completely dedicated, devoted only to the cause of Truth and Divinity. Thus He went from place to place and led a life of austerity. It has been described that he had been a great saint by dint of his austerities. It was through this great moral pursuit that He practised spiritital discipline and attained salvation.

He practised meditation and fasting simultaneously. He obstained from mere fastings without a suitable accompaniment of meditation and it is recorded that, "During a span of twelve years and thirteen fortnights of meditation, he subsisted upon a mere forty eight minute's sleep. The rest of the period was devoted to meditation, in large measure. A period of sixteen days and as many nights was spent in an unbroken meditation." In his praise has been remarked, "He has practised unprecedented depths of concentration. His meditation can be symbolised by the fairness of the moon and the conchshell." The sublimation of the soul calls for meditation more than fasting. "The Lord attained its highest intensity and he awoke the Supreme realization of *Kaivalya*."

He practised penances but He never granted them the status occupied by meditation. He equated, for the sake of simplicity the distinguished meditation of seven breathing periods with two days of fasting. It is said, "To launch upon fasts is always easier. The body may feel the discomfort of it on being denied the nourishment. Those undergoing it may find it difficult to concentrate."

The Lord did not value meditation, neither, as the supremely efficacious practice. Fasting cannot be denied its own value in the regimen. To a Jain meditation is something more than a curb on ideation. It implies a suppression of the mental urges and the body-processes as well.

These urge-processes are complex in nature and owe their origin to multiple mental planes as well as the physical and lingual ones.

The mind and the speech function through the instrumentality of the bodily frame. A placid body easily pacifies the lingual and the ideational faculties. A restive body is a major obstacle in the attainment of tranquillity. It follows that through the proccss of arresting this restiveness of the body, the mind can win serenity. There is no such end in view as that of

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afflicting the flesh. The body is only harnessed to spiral to higher planes.

It was through this long process of austerity and sacrifiee that the great Saint attained Enlightenment. It is generally believed that "to ascertain the self is righteous perception, to know it thus is righteous knowledge and to be grounded in it is righteous action." "Discomfort can be either natural or invited. Lord exhorted us to be indifferent to the natural calamities and thus win the rewards of stoicism. This maxim is one of great values to an aspirant. This resistance wanting, the aspirant is disconcerted at the least discomfort. It is far from suggesting here that discomforts should be voluntarily invited. Jainism is not difficult to practise on account of fasting and similar exercises.

Its difficulty lies in its emphasis on non-violence. Basically, non-violence and meditation have much in common. Non-violence is concentration into the self. Meditation is hardly different from it. The process of self-purification in the system of Lord Buddha consists of meditation, as is commonly believed and in the system of Lord Mahavira, non-violence.

In His biography we come to know closely the secret of His acquiring great spiritual power. "There is hardly any conceivable Yoga besides this. To proceed with the self, to exist in it and to conclude with it is meditation as well as non-violence. It is through this system of meditation that the Lord realised himself, to achieve the *summum bonum*. His followers require to know this fact and to know the supreme worth of meditation, as they do of fasting. They have to demonstrate that Jainism combines the two practices in an acceptable form."

According to Prof. Nilakantha Sastri, "For nearly thirty years after his enlightenment Mahavira travelled and taught in the valley of the middle Ganges. He wandered for eight months of the year and spent four months of the rainy season in some famous town of eastern India. The Jaina tradition gives the names of such places as Champa, Mithila, Sravasti, Vaisali, Rajagriha and other places. He often met Bimbisara and Ajatasatru who were equally on friendly terms with the Buddha."

Jainism is one of the oldest religions of the world.

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Hundreds of years before, the same thoughts were being propagated by the earlier *Tirthankaras*. Mahavira was the twenty fourth in this line. Immediately before Mahavira, the twenty third Tirthankara was Parsvanath, popularly known as Paresh Nath.

Parsvanath was also a prince. He was the son of Asvasena a king of Varanasi. He was married. His wife was Vama. The first thirty years of Parsvanath's life was as a householder. He gave up his princely robe at thirty to join the order of ascetics. He lived for hundred years. He died 250 years before the birth of Mahavira. "Parsva believed in the eternity of matter as did Mahavira after him. Parsva enjoined four great vows on his followers to avoid injury to life, to be truthful, not to steal, and to possess no property. To these Mahavira added a fifth—chastity. It is clear that some kind of Jain faith existed before Mahavira and his teachings were based on it. Thus he was more a reformer of an existing religion, and possibly of a church, than the founder of a new faith."

Jainsim, like Buddhism, was born as a challenge mostly against the Brahmanical pressure on rituals and closing religious door to the truth searcher non-Brahmins. Both Buddism and Jainism opened their doors to the masses. So long only Brahmins were allowed to drink the nectar of Vedic revealations of enlightened knowledge. *Vedas* could be studied only by the Brahmins. The ritualistic details by the Brahmins, the difficult Sanskrit religious scriptures, the riddles of caste-system all mingled together kept the masses away from leading a life of their choice. The deep desire for following religious rites. the practice of devotional disciplines were by and by so rigid that the masses felt they were being denied of an important aspect of social life which was to raise their moral uplift. Jainism and Buddhism preached and practised by the Enlightened came to them as boons.

Later Brahmanical scholars wanted to keep away these two great thoughts from "Indian philosophy" because they were not usual revealed knowledge as depicted in the Vedas. It was questioned "What then of Buddhism and Jainism? Shall we exclude them from the highest expressions of Indian thought? The fact is that they accept the authority of revealed knowledge and transcendental experience, though they deny the authority

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of the Vedas, particularly of the ritualistic portions, as a result of certain historical circumstances. They were born at time when the spirit of the Vedas had been lost, when the Hindus held faithfully only to the letter of the law, and when priest-craft reigned supreme. Religion confined itself to sacrificial rites. The yearning to know the truth of the Self, or Brahman in one's own soul, which is attained only by the pure in heart, was absent. Buddha, though he denied the authority of the Vedas, actually impressed their spirit upon his followers by urging them to live the pure life in order to free themselves from the burden of sorrow. And he showed the way by himself attaining *nirvana*-another name for *Samadhi*, the transcendental state."

Indian philosophy could not leave aside these two great schools from its scope of study later. They have become parts of Indian culture and heritage. Their influence was felt beyond the boundaries of the country. Even today millions of Buddhists and Jainas are living in India and abroad who belong to these two great schools. Any idea to isolate them from inclusion in Indian philosophy or Indian culture is not only unthinkable, it is an orthodox and narrow view. It was out of this very outlook—sectarian, narrow and orthodox of the few that these two great schools flourished. In his *Outline of Indian Philosophy* Prof. M. Hiriyanna says, "Indian philosophy aims beyond Logic. This peculiarity of the view-point is to be ascribed to the fact that philosophy in India did not take its rise in wonder or curiosity as it seems to have done in the West; rather it originated under the pressure of a practical need arising from the presence of moral and physical evil in life. It is the problem of how to remove this evil that troubled the ancient Indians most, and *moksa* in all the systems represents in state in which it is, in one sense or another, taken to have been overcome. Philosophic endeavour was directed primarily to find a remedy for the ills of life, and the consideration of metaphysical questions came in as a matter of course."

There is a common wrong notion that Jainism was an off-shoot of Buddhism. There cannot be a bigger mistake. It is observed: "It is customary among Western scholars to discover points of similarity between the lives of Mahavira and Buddha, who were contemporaries, and in consequence of this and of

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the further fact that both Jainism and Buddhism lay emphasis upon *ahimsa*, or noninjury, they look upon Jainism as an offshoot of Buddhism. But these two religions are really independent of each other, though parallel in their development. Mahavira is not the founder of Jainism but only, as remarked above, the last in a long succession of sages and seers. Parsvanath, who lived two centuries before the time of Mahavira, is another in this succession and also a historical figure."

What is Jainism? According to a great Saint. "The words Jain and Jainism are derived from the Sanskrit root *ji*, which means to conquer. A Jain is one who believes in conquering the flesh in order to attain to that supreme purity which leads to infinite knowledge, infinite happiness, and infinite power—the same conquering the flesh and the same self-liberation that all other religions of India have taught. It is said that Jainism is as old as the Vedic religion. Vardhamana, known also as Mahavira, or the supreme spiritual hero, whose name has come to be identified with Jainism, is but the last in a long series of inspired prophets, or seers:"

The difference between the twenty fourth *Tirthankara* and the twenty third being 250 years, even mathematically, the origin of Jain religion goes back to the early dawn of civilisation. It was definitely born and nurtured in India. The first *Tirthankara* was Rsabha. According to Jaina sources there are series of cosmic cycles "consiting of *utsarpini* or ages of expansion, and *avasarpini*, or ages of contraction or decay—our own age being one of the latter. During the present period of contraction twenty four *tirthankaras* have appeared from time to time, Rsabha, being the first and Mahavira the last.

It is interesting to mention that the name of the founder of Jainism, i.e. Rsabha, is mentioned also in *Rigveda*. His life is also narrated in two later *Puranas—Vishnu Puran* and *Bhagwat Puran*. According to Jainism, there was no creator or God. It is obvious from all Jaina literature that, "it regards the belief that the cosmic universe had a definite beginning in time as illogical and unthinkable, for that belief involves the further belief that a God, noncreative before creation suddenly changed his mind and became creative. The universe, therefore, con-

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sisting of *jivas*, or souls, and ajivas or beings which are not souls, must necessarily be without beginning and without end. It is not necessary to postulate a deity to explain the nature of the cosmos in which they can be manifested. To the critics of Jainism, who contend that for everything that is there must be a maker, the Jains put the question, "How then could the maker exist without another maker who made him, and so on backward without end? And if it is possible for one being to exist self-subsistent and eternal, why is it not possible for many to be likewise self-subsistent and eternal?"

This can be further confirmed from the daily prayer *mantra* of the Jainas. The prayer says, "Him who is the revealer of the path to salvation, who is the remover of mountains of *karmas*, and who is the knower of all reality, him I worship, in order that I may realise his qnalities within myself."

In the Cultural History of the land we find it is recorded "According to Jainism there is no God or Creator and man's emancipation from suffering does not depend upon the mercy of any such Being. By living an austere life of purity and virtue, man can escape the ills of life. The best was the life of renunciation and it was the shortest way to salvation. Jainism is thus more a moral code than a religion. God as understood by other religions is not needed by Jainism because it denies both intermediation and forgiveness. However, if the necessity arose it was not unwilling to admit a god of popular Hinduism to its galaxy. Being much less hostile and more accommodating to Hinduism than the other heterodox system Jainism has survived in India till today."

There is no other supernatural power. Man can become a Superman by ascetic practice. The ultimate goal of all spiritual practice therefore is to become a Man-God *Paramat mana*, Supreme perfected spirit. The highest stage of spiritual achievement is the stage of *Siddha Parameshthin* which is described as a State "absolutely unconditional, a state of passionless peace in which one is released from action and is without desire."

This is very much like the state of *Sachchidananda* state of ancient Saints. *Moksha* is the ultimate goal of every life. There are similarities in higher thought of Vedanta and Jainism.

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It is recorded, "Like all other schools of Indian thoughts, it conceives of *karma* as something material, which uniting with the soul, binds a man to the world and its attractions. Though it is regarded as a material substance, *karma* is yet so subtle that it is unperceivable by the senses. It is in this *karma* that the soul is bound, and it is for this reason that the soul is embodied in the substance of a being and that it is embodied from a beginningless past. But, though this bondage has no beginning, it may definitely have an end, for the soul is essentially free and divine, and just as soon as its true nature is realized *karma* disappears. The Vedantic doctrine of *avidya*, or ignorance, also holds that individual ignorance, though it may end, has no beginning."

The long journey of the *Jina*, the conquerer was not an easy one. Besides his personal penance, *krichrasadhana* which He himself imposed upon Himself, the Saint was tortured by innumerable people. Many of them were religious rivals, many were ignorant fools, many did it just for the fun of it. The great Saint took everything as part of the game. He did not protest anywhere, did not challenge anybody and underwent the torture, silently and diligently.

Many foolish persons attacked Him because of His nakedness. They would take Him as mad. They would pelt stone at Him. They would run after Him just to bully Him. He would not utter a single word. He would not raise His finger in protest even.

The Mahayogin used to keep *mouni*. He would not talk for days and months. And only for this He had many difficulties. Once a cowherd who lost his buffalo and found Him the solitary witness in the field caught hold of Him and started interrogating Him. He would not open His mouth. The rustic stupid man pierced the ears of the Saint with some thorns in protest. They were bleeding profusely. It did not serve his purpose. The silent monk would not break His vow. He could not compromise with circumstances.

The biographer of the Saint gives details of the torture by different urchins, opponents, dacoits and even rulers and law givers. Sometimes it was due to misunderstanding, sometimes it was due to deliberate vendetta, sometimes it was just

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for the fun of it. In the *Acharanga Sutra 1(18), (4)* the pathetic details are given.

The Saint was reduced to a mere skeleton because of austerity, fasts and strict self imposed disciplines. He could hardly ever understand what the other man was talking about. He was not interested in that either. His only goal was to become a *Kewali*, a fully Enlightened Soul.

The *Acharanga Sutra* tells us, during this period, people used to hilt Him with sticks, sometimes they used to shower blows on Him, sometimes they would throw spears at Him, sometimes they would pelt stones at Him and sometimes they would not hesitate to throw brokcn earthern jars at Him. The savage beast-like people would shout loudly at the top of their voice and beat Him mercilessly. And He would keep quiet without the slightest provocation

Once, it is recorded in *Acharanga Sutra*, the Saint was meditating completely still. His body was not moving a bit. The wicked people who were surrounding Him just for the fun of it, had cut flesh out of the body, torn out His hair, threw dust in His eyes and finally had lifted the body and threw it down on earth.

He tolerated all these pains, injuries and insults calmly, humbly and unstirred.

Just like a highly skilled General enters the battle field surrounded by enemies unstirred, so the great Saint proceeded gradually step by step to the path of *Nirvana*.

Once Mahavir on way to pilgrimage entered an unknown principality. He thought of resting there overnight. At dawn He started His journey. Suddenly a number of guards jumped on Him. They were sure they had achieved their target. For the last few days they were trying to catch a thief. The City Father himself was supervising everything that night. So the jubilant team presented Mahavira before the City Father.

He was a "foreigner" there. Being an outsider he faced double difficulties. The rulers were convinced it was He who was causing the new menace in the town.

The Saint was produced in the Court. They asked Him so many questions. But no reply. How is it that the man does not respond even to physical torture? They kicked Him. They pounced on Him. They hurled blows on Him. No effect. They

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were convinced the thief must be a seasoned one. The fellow has come out naked and is now pretending to be deaf. He must be the real culprit. Let us take him to the Court.

The team members were sure of their reward. They had got the rlght culprit.

"Give him a dose. Get details from him," roared the ruler.

They said, "the fellow is pretending to be deaf. He does not respond to any dose Sir."

When they found the man was not at all easy to handle they decided to hang him.

"We give you another chance. Be sure. You are going to be hanged. Tell us who you are, why did you come here?"

It hardly had any effect.

So finally they decided to hang him.

The details are given in the Saint's biography by Jaina monks. The assassins were to hang him. But how is it the rope does not fit in round the neck? It came out automatically. They cannot fix the knot. The anecdote is ascribed to some of the few miracles shown by the Lord. It is said they tried seven times to tie the knot round the neck to hang him and they failed to do so every time. They got not only puzzled, they got frightened too. This is not an ordinary man. He must be a deeply spiritual person with great miraculous power. They set Him free.

People did not hesitate setting dogs after Him. On more than one occasions the Saint was confronted with ferocious dogs. They could not do Him any harm.

In *Majjhim* we get the first utterance of the Lord after Enlightement. This great message of the Master is recorded also in contemporary Buddhist literature. The Saint said : Listen all of you: I have attained success in my *Sadhana*, I have attained Enlightenment. I have become all-knowing (*Sarbajna*). all rounder (*Sarbadarshee*). There is nothing beyond my knowledge. While walking or standing, while asleep or awake, I am fully conscious of everything because of the *Parajnan*. Oh the dearest *Nirgrantha Sadhakas*, the sins that you have committed in your past life will have to be wiped out by severe austerity and penance and strong discipline.

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From now onwards you will have to discipline yourself in your thoughts, speech and action, By that only you will progress. You have to sanctify yourselves only by repentance and non-attachment. Only then your chance for rebirth-will certainly get defeated. Only as a result of this new action you will get rid of all pains of suffering and your heart and soul (*mana* and *chitta*) will reach the goal.

The most important aspect of the Saint's new message was that He did not restrict it only to monks or nuns. He opened the door to one and all. The householders had easy access to practise his new religions. There was no binding for them. "Be pure in heart and you will get enlightenment". He assured one and all. Like all great Saints of the world, one by one eminent scholars, religious heads, ordinary people started approaching the great Saint. Some of them wanted to carry further His message. Some dedicated their all at His feet.

At Nalanda the Saint came in touch with Mankhaliputra Goshal, an eminent ascetic of the *Ajeevika* order. Ajeevikas were followers of Parsvanath, the twenty third Tirthankara. He was a naked monk of great spiritual power. On His return from long penance and Enlightenment when the Saint was returning to Nalanda and Rajgir, two great centres of learning, there was great excitement among all to meet Him. Some were curious, some eager and some mad to meet the great Saint immediately. Goshal was one of them. The meeting took place at Nalanda. The young Saint was fascinated by the glow of inner light of the Master. He had never seen such an incarnation of unattachment, deep meditative appearance and piercing eyes. Goshal became a disciple of Mahavira.

By and by Mahavira's fame as a spiritual leader spread like wild fire. People thronged in thousands just to listen to Him and get spiritual guidance.

Acharya Bhadravahu, a great Jaina scholar tells us how the respected Mahavira became *Jin* or *Kewali* or the Enlightened One. He was *Sarbajnani*. He knew everything. He was aware of all worldly subjects. His knowledge was all-pervading about the three worlds the godmen and demons. He knew, through deep spiritual insight what men, beasts, and divine souls, creatures in heaven and hell were doing or thinking. He knew about their way of living. He knew all the secrets of the

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Universe, He has become an *Arhat*, one whose knowledge is limitless. There is nothing on earth great or small which is not known to Him.

The details are given in the *Kalpasutra*, 121.

That day the Brahmins of the time had concentrated in the house of Somilacharya an influential Brahmin. Among those invited was Acharya Indrabhuti a great learnd scholar. People were pouring to the town in thousands. This surprised Indrabhuti who asked Somilacharya the reason for this sudden big crowd thronging in the township. "Is there any special programme of entertainment here ?" He asked.

The spectators themselves were describing the features of the new Saint, His glowing face, His great learning and above all His great compassion.

Indrabhuti started questioning them. He wanted to impress upon them that the new monk only had put some magic spell on them. Nothing more than that. How could He declare Himself Tirthankara ?

Indrabhuti wanted to test the knowledge of the new comer. So he also started for the gathering with his disciples. He was quite an influential religious head and had a large following. When Indrabhuti reached the spot he was surprised at the intimate address of welcome by the Saint.

"Acharya Indrabhuti, why are you standing at the back. Your place is here alongwith me. Please come near me."

Indrabhuti was stunned.

How could He know his name ?

He could not speak out.

"Yes, Acharya you have dabbled in so many scriptures and big books. Have you been able to explore Truth ? How is it that your mind is still so agitated. Are you sure you have got the secrets of all knowledge ? How are you yet so doubtful about the existence of soul ?"

Indrabhuti was dumb struck ! How could this new Saint know all the queries of his mind ? How could He know all his problems?

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He was convinced Mahavira had attained great spiritual power by dint of which He could penetrate into the heart of all. The old learned scholar fell at Mahavira's feet and wanted to solve his spiritual problems. Acharya Indrabhuti became the foremost among the disciples of Mahavira. His new name was Ganadhar. He joined the Saint alongwith all his disciples and carried the banner of the Saint from place to place. The major discourses described in the Jaina scriptures cover the important discussions between Mahavira and Ganadhar.

The most important contribution of Mahavira in Indian cultural history is his organising the Jains on a scientific order. It was this great Tirthankara who gave the followers of the faith a common platform, a proper organisation, a chain of codes of conduct for daily life. He might have not been the founder of the Jain religion, there is no doubt that for all practical purposes He was the first among the saints to set the old house in order. He established the four categories of sacred order or *tirthas*: *Monk*, *Nun*, *Male Householder* who is an aspirant and his female counterpart. That certainly gives Him the credit of being as good as the 'founder' of Jaina religion.

What is His main contribution to world philosophy ? What is the main idea among all his teachings? In one word that is *Ahimsa*—Non-violence. According to a Jain Muni, "Mahavira the seer, observed the universe, experienced it and explained it by means of his truly objective vision. The highest reward in his ethical order is non-violence. It has been variously described as equability as well. Equability is a science in itself."

The final aim of all spiritual aspirations should be the release of the soul. The great Saint insists :

Practise not *dharma* for the present incarnation.
Practisc it not for worldly gains, in this life.
Practise not *dharma* for the subsequent incarnations.
Practise it not for worldly gains in those lives.
Practise not *dharma* for earning credit and status.
Practise *dharma* to purge the soul and realise it.

Himself an incarnation of fearlessness, Mahavira insisted on all to be bold. This is one of the most important sermons of the Master. This leads to higher values of life. A man who is

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truthful, honest and sincere can only be fearless because he has nothing to hide. Mahavira says, "Be not afraid. One who is afflicted with fear suffers segregation and helplessness. Such a phobia leads to a haunted existence. Such a sacred being loses hold on his austerity and restraint. Nor is he, then, capable of bearing his responsibility. He disburdens himself of his moral responsibilities. A scared being cannot stick to his morally prescribed path. Shun all fear on that account.

Fear not untowards situations. Be not afraid of alien environment. Be not afraid of indisposition and cureless ailments. Be not afraid of age and death. Be invincible. A heart inspired with invincibility can win the reward of truth."

One must fully prepare himself for the utmost sacrifice. One has to conquer oneself first. This is another basic sermon of the Master. He says :

> "It is the self who is the author of its happiness and affliction. It alone is its friend and its foe. Let it be restrained. One who restrains it wins the reward of lasting happiness. One is required to struggle with one's self only. When one is crowned with success in the venture, one conquers the universe and is delivered of all affliction."
>
> "Deem not another as your foe. It is your own faith that is projected in the other as friendship and an absence of it as enmity. Be unprejudiced towards all. Each will appear as a friend to you, then. To regard another as enemy is to suffer self-mistrust. It is preferable to presume friendship in the opponent rather than start with the presumption of his harbouring enmity with us and then to attempt to befriend him. Here lies the gem of world peace."
>
> "Seek not quitetude without. Seek in your own self the everlasting fountains of quietetude. Make a venture and the stream of quietetude will burst forth unhindered. Material comforts may pander to you will pleasures but the real happiness is far to seek. To seek the quintessence of lasting peace, go into your self. Practise epuilibrium. Each iota of yours will, then, emanate peace."
>
> "Man, you own immense might. You are the maker of your destiny. Have faith in your own enterprise. Make an effort and the result is assured. He alone is venturesome

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who banks upon his own initiative. This faith will win for you the *summum bonum*. The utmost stress is on moral values and one's outlook to society. Falsehood, dishonesty, pretensions must be completely shunned. Otherwise none can go higher in spiritual domain. The great saint says :

"He alone is virtuous who shuns sin during day and during night, in isolation and in company, in sleep and in waking and thus escapes moral lapse. Such beings never lose touch with the Supreme Soul, and are transmuted into the latter, ultimately." Uproot unhappiness, lock, stock and barrel. Those who seek to remedy unhappiness without remedaying its root-cause, can never escape it."

"Casteism is irrational. He alone is exposed to such vitiated ideas who is not grounded in truth. It is one soul that reposes in the coloured and the white, the oriental and the Occidental, the virtuous and the vicious, the male and the female. Be not swayed by the pride of your caste. Boost not your ego with the complex of being superior to another. Be not mean or piteous by considering self as inferior to another. Be equal in all situations. Man reaps as he sows. Good actions beget good results and the bad results.

"The main sign of *Dharma* is non-violence. The next significance is stoicism. One who loses his grip on stoicism under stress, cannot practise non-violence. A truly non-violent being would confer love on his enemies like his friends. He can put with insults with fortitude. The one capable of being indifferent to happy situation and the unhappy one, dispassionately, is stoic and non-violent.

"The *Dharma* resposes in a virtuous life. *Dharma* is the last thing to be found in non-virtuous life. *Dharma* is not only a conveyor to the happy destiny, it is much desirable for a happy existence in the present. One who is not rewarded with peace in one's present existence by virtue of one's moral conduct can hardly hope to achieve it at some future stage.

"Practise not *dharma* for prosperity and comforts nor for religious credit, but for the purgation of your own self." One must never lose balance. Whether in joy or in sorrow, in pleasure or pain, in bliss or grief one must not lose

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balance. It is very much like the message of *Geeta* where a man is supposed to be *Sthitaprajna*. *Dharma* purports to achieve emancipation. It, however, is of no small value in our diurnal existence. Lord Mahavira defined *dharma* as *equability*. "Be unruffled in prosperity and adversity, life and death, applause and humility, honour and disgrace."

The Lord inunciated certain codes of conduct for one to become a *Jin*. He said : *Liberty* was the first principle of life. The Jain philosophy lays down the main principles:

"The first principle propounded by Mahavira was that of liberty. The rest of the principles seem to converge to it. The one who is devoid of the spirit of liberty will find the rest of his principles reduced a naught. Liberty is the prime fountain of all power. Coercive deterrance cannot form a valid basis for spiritualism. Identical is the case with democracy. Spiritualism draws upon the power that inheres in the spirit and democracy draws upon the power inhering in the people. When an individual is fired with the urge to enjoy liberty, spiritualism comes to the fore; when a people is fired with a similar urge, democracy comes into being.

"The next principle of the Lord was self-determination. He taught us that it is against our sovereignty to leave our destiny in the hands of others. He preached that we are the creators of our own happiness and unhappiness. We are our own friends and we are our own foes. It is left to us to decide what we make of ourselves. It is a valuable principle in democratic thought. Where an individual ceases to enjoy the right of self-determination, his potential is thwarted. Dauntless capacity is needed to achieve development and it is the right of self-determination that breeds this capacity."

One must have full control over oneself. One must have self-confidence too. It is through self control and purity of mind that one gets self-confidence.

"The third principle of Mahavira was self-restraint. He pleaded that you must spare others from the compass of your restraint. You have to exercise your control over yourself, i.e. your body, your speech and your mind. You have to rule yourself by means of restraint, and austerity. To submit to another's control's is to submit to a coercive evil."

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Lord Mahavira is so relevant even today. He insisted that all must get equal opportunity in every sphere. So "the fourth" principle of Mahavira was relativity.

It implied equal opportunities to all. "While we churn the curd, and draw one hand towards ourselves, the other is moved forward. Next we reverse the movement of the respective hands. This results in separating the cream."

Greatest stress is laid on soul. A man may become a godman if his soul is pure. A good soul and God are identical. So the Jaina holy scriptures say :

"Lord Mahavira established the true identity between the soul and God." It led to other revelations :

Freedom of will of the soul and Moral desert of the soul.

Spiritual efforts and individual pursuit are the inevitable corollaries of these truths. These led the Lord to deliver the religion of formalism and ritualism. To borrow his words, "religion is the process of rendering the soul unto God." Sects, sectorial norms and the rites can, at best, be the adjuncts of a religion, not the religion itself.

"Religion is a situation of the soul striving to become God." It is the state of primal purity. The Lord lays down, "*Dharma* resides in the pure soul." What He meant is that *dharma* is no other than the purity of soul. The soul contaminated with the sense object is impure, the one intact of these being pure. This purity is nothing but *dharma*.

This is a common ground for all high descriptions of saints in India. Almost all saints have been saying that a pure human heart is the dwelling temple of God.

Salutations to that great messenger of peace and unity.

Mangalam Bhagwan Veero
Mangalam Goutama Gani
Mangalam Kundakundadyon
Jaina Dharmastu mangalam.

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BUDDHA—THE LIGHT OF ASIA

(560 BC—480 BC)

More than two thousand five hundred years ago the world heard the eternal message of Asia when the Enlightened Buddha said, "The greatest of all conquerors is not he who conquers a thousand men a thousand times in battle, but he who conquers his own mind."

One of the brightest stars in the spiritual sky of India Gautama Buddha was born 560 years before Christ at Lumbini at the foot of the Himalayas. He was a prince. His father was King Suddhodana and mother Mahamaya. Suddhodana's capital was at Kapilavastu. He was the ruler of the little Sakya republic. They werc members of the warrior caste—*Kshatriyas.*

Mahamaya was travelling in state from Kapilavastu to Devadaha, her parents' home to have the first child. Mahamaya's father was the king of Koli. Devadaha was his capital. On way to father's palace the queen gave birth to the divine son int he Lumbini grove between tall *sal* trees. The child who was destined to be a holy man did not prefer a royal palace as his birth place. He left both the palaces before birth and touched the earthly soil in a jungle. Lumbini, today is a world pilgrimage.

Before the birth of the child, Mahamaya had many dreams. They were just wonderful. In one such dream Mahamaya "saw a great multitude of people bowing down to her". Wise men were consulted. They predicted the coming of a son who would command world respect.

Seven days after the birth of the child, who was named Siddhartha, Mahamaya died. Siddhartha was brought up by Prajapati who was Mahamaya's sister and Suddhodana's second wife.

Asita, a veteran scholar of astrology, visited Kapilavastu and was a royal guest at this time. He expressed his keen desire to see the new born. But what is this? Immediately after seeing the child the learned scholar started shedding tears.

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The King was surprised.
He asked "Why these tears?"

The learned man said, "What shall I say? The tears are of joy. A great saviour of mankind has appeared on earth in your palace. You are a lucky father. Also tears of sorrow because Suddhodana would not live enough to see the name, fame and all his achievements throughout the world".

It was perhaps Asita, the scholar who suggested that name of the child should be Siddhartha which means one whose purpose has been fulfilled.

Mahaprajapati Gautami, the step-mother gave all the care that a motherless child needs. King Suddhodana followed the child like a shadow and gave minutest attention to his needs. What needs?

The boy does not like the company of anybody. He wants to stay alone. Sometimes he would wander about in the garden and would be deeply absorbed in his thoughts.

What does He ponder over?
Does He think of the mother?

But He does not have the faintest idea about a mother. Besides, Mahaprajapati Gautami looks after the child so well, she showers her affection so unreservedly that the child should not have any scope for brooding over the lost mother whose face he must not be remembering at all. Then, what can be the subject-matter of the child's thoughts?

The child would roam about in solitude in a garden. One day as He was on his daily round a swan fell at his feet suddenly. It was wounded. Just a minute before this, He was happy to notice a swarm of swans flying over head. How is it? The young prince took care of the wounded bird, drawing the shaft from the wound. His cousin Devadatta had shot the bird. He came to claim it. Siddhartha did not part with the bird. He said a person who kills the bird does not own it. One who saves it owns it. He personally nursed it and finally set it free. This was the first indication of the child's unbounded love for man and creatures.

Siddhartha had a keen sense of observation. Another day

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he saw a serpent catching hold of a lizard which had just swallowed an insect. Suddenly a kite which was flying high in the sky carried off the serpent. These mutual attacks and violence hurt the young mind.

Is it life? Is there no other way out of it? He pondered. But He kept everything to Himself. Siddhartha's father was quite worried over His loneliness and philosophical attitude to life. He wanted to train up the child. So he asked Him what He would like to do next.

The young lad immediately requested the king to allow Him to go beyond the boundaries of the palace and see the world in person. So far the prince was not allowed to cross even the palace gate. The king advised the attendants to be careful. They must see that the prince does not come across any untoward incident or uphappy scene which might cause him mental tension. The prince was too sensitive, too delicate and sentimental. The king warned them all.

Things were quite alright. One by one, the prince saw four scenes which suddenly left a deep impression in His mind. He questioned the futility of life. The prince saw a sick man, then he saw an old man whose palsied limbs and sunken eyes betrayed deep but unspoken misery. Then He saw four persons carrying a bier. Finally he saw a monk.

The prince asked the coachman who was driving the chariot the reasons for all these miseries. The poor charioteer explained in his own way that the final goal of all is to embrace death.

Siddhartha mused within himself "Is there no way out of all this suffering to which human beings are subject?

This was the turning event in the life of Siddhartha. It was from this scene that Siddhartha had the first hint of the life of a monk. Giving the details of this episode the biographer tells us, "One day, during this period of his life, he bade his charioteer drive him through the city that lay beyond the part surrounding the palace, for He desired to view the city of Kapilavastu and know life as it was lived by the people. As He rode through the streets of the city, He saw many things, among them, children playing and men and women carrying on their work. At all this He was pleased, for He cried to His charioteer, 'I see here labour and poverty, and hunger; yet so much

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beauty, love, and joy are mingled with them—surely life, after all, is very sweet.'

No sooner had He uttered these words than there came into view, one after another, the three woes of men—weariness, diseases and death. This was the turning point of his life.

First came weariness. Before Him appeared an old man, tottering on his crutches, which he held with trembling hands. The charioteer explained : "All men are subject to old age, and old age, if it lasts long enough, will always end thus."

Then drew near to Him a man, ghastly to look upon, suffering from the deadly poison of leprosy. Prince Gautama ran straight to him, and embraching him cried, "My brother!" Again did the charioteer explain what the prince saw. He said that the man was suffering from a disease and that every man is subject to disease in many forms. "And this is the life", mused Gautama, "that I thought so sweet!" For some time he was silent. Then He asked "How can one escape from life? What friend has he to release him?" 'Death', replied the chariotcer. "Look! There come bearers of the dead, carrying one to the riverside to burn".

"But indeed', he continued, 'men do not wish to die. Death, they think, is their worst enemy. Him they hate and try do escape, though there is no escape'.

"Take me home", Prince Gautama now commanded the driver. He had been 'stung by the woes of men'. Thenceforth he sought a way to escape misery, not for himfelf only but for all humanity. His heart melted in sympathy and compassion for all beings."

Then suddenly he saw a monk with a glow on his face and felt within himself that the mendicant must have conquered all these miseries.

He somehow could not forget these scenes. They were following the noble-hearted like a shadow. He would simply wait for the day when he could join that state of monkhood.

The king noticed all this but was sure all these moody things will disappear the moment Siddhartha got married. He decided to get the prince married to a beautiful princess. Siddhrtha selected his wife himself. The story is fascinating.

"Gautama was positive on one point. He must see his bride, and choose her for himself. So all the young nobles

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who had sisters were invited with them to spend a week at court; and morning after morning there would be games of skill, whirling of clubs or fencing or riding. And in the evenings plays or displays of juggling or serpent-charmings were given in the palace-theatre, and all enjoyed the entertainments together.

There was one lady whom the king and his ministers and even those guests hoped that the Prince would choose. For her beauty and talents and birth were even more distinguished than those of others. And her name was Yasodhara.

But when the last day came and Gautama stood beyond the doors saying farewell to his guests and offering to each some splendid memento—to one a necklace, to another a bracelet, to a third some beautiful gem—he had nothing at all for Yasodhara, save a single flower which he took from his own cloak. And the onlookers understood from this neglect that he had made some other choice. And all, save the maiden herself, were very sorry. To her, that one blossom seemed more precious than all the jewels of her friends. And when next day, the king of Kapilavastu waited in person on her father to ask her in marriage for his son, it was scarcely a surprise to her. It seemed only strange that it should be so simple and natural. Perhaps she was already half-conscious of the long chain of lives behind them in which she had always been his wife.

Siddhartha was a loving husband. Although he had a searching mind and got himself lost in deeper thoughts, Siddhartha was a 'cheerful' young man. He was intelligent, bright, clever in studies and used to take keen interest in games. He was an exteremely kind person with the heart of a mother.

The beautiful princess Yasodhara was dutiful too. They had a son Rahula.

Siddhartha could not forget the scene of the mendicant with an ever smiling face. He thought it was only through renunciation that one could get real bliss and enlightenment. His heart was bleeding. He was only waiting for an opportune moment.

He became restless. He lost sleep at night. He was an affectionate father. He thought that before the attachment turned deep He should leave the palace. "An oil lamp cast

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a *dim religious light* and smoke rose from the incense burner under the bee. Siddhartha tore himself away and unknown to anybody, rode away towards a forest. He discarded his royal robes, cut his long hair with his sword and became an ascetic."

He did meet Yasodhara and the child before leaving the palace. He had great affection for them both. But the call of divine supreme was stronger. Before renouncing the palace the restless prince used to sit under a *Jambu* tree in the royal garden trying to calm his mind. It is said it was here that the prince had a vision of a holy man who appeared before him and told him, 'You are the Blessed one come to the world to save and redeem mankind. Now is the time. Fulfil your mission'. The holy man vanished.

Swami Vivekananda described the supreme moment thus :

"The gods sang 'Awake. Thou art the awakened. Arise and help the world.' And the struggling prince returned again to the bedside of his sleeping wife. What was the problem that vexed him? Why, it was she whom he was about to sacrifice for the world ! That was the struggle. He cared nothing for himself. Then the victory and the inevitable farewell and the kisses imprinted so gently on the foot of the princess that she never awoke. Have you ever thought of the hearts of the heroes, how they were great, great and soft as butter?"

Then He called Channa, His faithful charioteer and asked him to bring *Kandaka* his peerless horse. He mounted the steed and rode out accompanied by Channa. The city was fast asleep and none knew that Siddhartha was riding from his royal home into homelessness. When he came to the river Anoma, he halted, cut off his silken hair with his sword and divested himself of his silken robes and ornaments. He gave the horse and valuables to Channa and asked him to give them to the King with his greetings and to tell him that all was well with the prince.

Now he went on his road alone, begging his food and after some time came to Rajagriha, the capital of the kingdom of Magadha, where King Bimbisara was ruling. People flocked to see Siddhartha, attracted by his noble bearing and beauty. The King also came to see him and told him, 'Your hands are fit to grasp the reins of an empire : You would not hold a beggar's bowl'. Siddhartha replied, 'Better than sovereignty,

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better than heaven is the fruit of holiness. I pray you pity me not. Pity rather those who are burdened with the cares of the world.' The King bowed to him and said, 'May you obtain that which you seek and having obtained it, come back I pray you, and receive me as your disciple.'

The prince spent some restless days. Then he came in touch with two great learned men. He became their disciple one by one. These two great scholars Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta however, could not quench his thirst. He was not satisfied with their teachings. He was determined to attain perfect knowledge and Enlightenment. He left them finally and roamed about in Magadha and finally settled at Uruvela in the neighbourhood of *Bodha-Gaya.* Here he joined forces with five ascetics who were practising the most rigorous penance for self-enlightenment, and final bliss. For six years he practised such austerities that he was reduced to a walking skeleton. But no enlightenment, no glimpse into the riddle of the world came. One day, worn out by penance and hunger, he fainted and his followers believed he was dead. Recovering consciousness he realised the futility of his fasts and self-mortification. He restarted taking food and thereby regained strength. Having seen him backsliding in this manner the five followers left him in disgust. The Buddha then began to meditate and passed through four stages of contemplation, culminating perfect self possession and equanimity, free alike from feelings of pain or ease. Thus meditating he sat beneath the *Bodhi* Tree for forty-nine days. At the dawning of the forty ninth day he saw the truth. "In me thus set free the kdowledge of freedom arose and I knew 'rebirth has been destroyed, the higher life has been led; what had to be done has been done, I have no more to do with this world.' This knowledge came to me in the last watch of the night : ignorance was destroyed, light had arisen, as I sat there earnest, strenuous, resolute." For another seven weeks he remained under the *Bodhi* Tree, meditating on the great truth he had found.

For a time he despaired of teaching the truth to others since he left that it was so recondite and difficult to express that few would understand it. The god Brahma then appeared before him and persuaded him to teach the world. "The doors of immortality are open. Let them that have ears to hear show

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faith", he said acquiesingly to Brahma. But he wondered to whom he should first preach the doctrine. He thought of his former teachers but a spirit told him that they had recently died. Then he thought of the five ascetics who had been his companions during his austerities but deserted him when he abandoned fasting, by superhuman insight he perceived that they were living in the Deer Park, Insipatana, modern Saranath, near Varanasi.

To these five ascetics the Buddha preached his first sermon or "set in motion the Wheel of the Law". The sermon contains the "Four Noble Truths" and the "Noble Eightfold Path" which are accepted, as basic doctrines by all Buddhist sects. It is reproduced in Buddha's own words noted by his dssciples on the spot :

"Thus I have heard. Once the Master was at Varanasi (Banaras) at the Deer Park called *Insipatana*. There the Master addressed the five monks :

"There are two extremes, O monks, which he who has gone forth ought not to follow : The habitual practice, on the one hand, of those things whose attraction depends upon the pleasures of sense, and especially of sensuality and the habitual practice, on the other hand, of self-mortification.

"There is a Middle Way, O monks, avoiding these two extremes, discovered by the Tathagata—a path which opens the dyke and bestows understanding, which leads to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom, to full enlightenment to *Nirvana*.

"And which is that Middle Way ? Verily it is the Noble Eightfold path. That is to say :

"Right Views : Right Aspirations : Right Speech, Right Conduct :

Right Livelihood: Right effort: Right Mindfulness: Right Rapture.

"Now this, O monks, is the noble truth. Concerning suffering, Buddha realised the Four Noble Truths :

First, "birth is painful, and so is old age; disease is painful, and so is death. Union with the unpleasant is painful, painful is separation from the pleasant; and any craving

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that is unsatisfied, that too is painful. In brief, the five aggregates which spring from attachment are painful.

Second, "Now this, O monks, is the noble truth concerning the origin of suffering. Verily it originated in that craving which causes the renewal of becomings, is accompanied by sensual delight, and seeks satisfaction now here, now there-that is to say, the craving for the gratification of the passions, or the craving for a future life, or the craving for success in this present life.

Third, "Now this, O monks is the noble truth concerning the destruction of suffering.

Verily, it is the destruction, in which no craving remains over, of this very thirst; the laying aside of, the getting rid of, the being free from the harbouring no longer of, this thirst.

Fourthly, "And this, O monks, is the noble truth concerning the way which leads to the destruction of suffering.

"Verily, it is this Noble Eightfold Path;

"So long, O monks, as my knowledge and insight were not quite clear regarding each of these four noble truths in this twelve-fold manner—so long I knew that I had not attained to the full insight of that wisdom which is unsurpassed in the heavens or on earth, among the whole race of recluses and brahmins, gods or men. But now I have attained it. This knowledge and insight have arisen within me. Immovable is the emancipation of my heart. This is my last existence, There will be no rebirth for me."

"Thus spake at the Blessed One. The five ascetics, glad at heart, exulted the words of the Blessed One."

The main message of the Buddha to the world is to serve mankind. In all his sermons the Enlightened soul gave highest emphasis to welfare of man.

In an address to the monks at Saranath 2,500 years ago, Buddha originally said.

"Charat bikkava charik bahujana-hitaya bahujana—sukhaya Lokanukampay athay hitaya sukhaya devamanussanam."

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hundreds of householders offered themselves to join the new order. Old royal servants joined their beloved Prince. This included the family barber, the keeper of the royal wardrobe and many court servants. Among those who joined Buddha at Kapilavastu were Siddhartha's cousin Devadatta, and Upali, the barber. Ananda was the favourite disciple of the Master.

A very affluent merchant of Sravasti, Anathapindika joined ths Brotherhood and contributed fabulously. The king of Khosala, Prasenajit became His lay disciple. When he fell ill at Rajagriha thc King sent his royal physician to look after Him, who joined the Order. This eminent physician was Jivaka Kumarabhrtya. One of His most important disciples was Ananda to whom the Master expressed His ideas particularly on discipline and demeanour.

"According to the Buddhist doctrine of *Karma*, one is not always compelled by an iron necessity to go through worldly joys and sorrows from one life to another. *Karma* is not pre-destination imposed on us by some mysterious creator to which we must helplessly submit ourselves. Though of pre-Buddhist origin, the doctrine of *Karma* was highly developed by the Buddha and His followers, who held that a being possesses the freedom of will to act, irrespective of his acts in his previous births. Existence, whether in bad or good conditions, is impermanent though the latter is the better of the two. The best is freedom from *Karma*, *naiskarmya*, leading to *arhatship* and consequently to *nirvana* (*moksha* of the Brahmanical philosophy), the total extinction of personality. During one of his sermons, the Buddha pointed to the flame of a lamp, saying it was passing through a cycle of rebirth and death. Then He blew out the flame and said, "The flame is now extinguished. It will not burn any longer. The same is the case with an *Arhat* who attains *nirvana* (lit. extinction) for he will be born no more."

Equally important was *Nirvana*. *Nirvana* is the final goal of an ascetic. A lay disciple also can aspire to have *nirvana* if he leads a pure life. According to Buddha :

"*Nirvana*, the ideal, requires constant spiritual exercise and contemplation. Before soaring into the subtle regions of thought the *yogin* or the spiritual aspirant cultivates the four noble sentiments, *Brahmaviharas*, which gave a foretaste of life in the Brahma world. *Metta* or universal love, *Karuna* or compassion,

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mudita or sympathetic joy and *upekkha* or equanimity are the four sentiments which know no bounds of time, space or class." The Buddha imbued the robber Angulimala's mind with *metta* and the robber was converted into a spiritual wayfarer. "When your fellow beings are in misery, you must feel compassion for them and when they are happy you must feel happiness. These feelings are not restricted to mankind alone but cover all beings, past, present, future, whether of this world or of other worlds. Equanimity should be so real that you should feel the same towards a man who besmears your arm with sandal paste and one who hacks your other arm with an axe. Universal love and equanimity are also regarded as the perfections or *paramitas*."

Once an unwise person wanted to provoke the Buddha and unnecessarily started abusing Him. The Buddha did not lose His temper. He only asked him, "If a man declined to accept a present made to Him to whom does he return it ?" The unwise man said, "To the person who offers it". Then Buddha said, "I do not accept your present of abuses. So you can imagine they go back to you." Here He said His famous sermon : "A wicked man who abuses a virtuous one is like one who looks up and spits at heaven; the spittle does not soil heaven but comes back and defiles his own person."

Another day Buddha went to a farmer for alms. The farmer got a little annoyed and very rudely told Him that it was by hard labour that he was getting his harvest. Buddha very quietly told him, "I too have earned my bread". The farmer rejoined, "Then where is your plough and where are your oxen?" The Buddha said, "The seed I sow is faith, the rain that waters the seed is repentance, wisdom is my plough and yoke, the oxen that draw the plough are diligence; with truth I cut away the weeds of sin and ignorance; my harvest is the fruit of immortality."

Buddha went to Vaisali after eight years to have a dinner with Ambapali, from where he went to Belua. Here He fell seriously ill. Ananda, the most beloved disciple could not check himself. He asked for the direction of the Master as to how to run the organisation in His absence. The Buddha said, "What does the Order expect of me, Ananda? I have preached the truth. I have no closed fist and have kept nothing back. I have grown old and my journey is drawing to its close. O Ananda,

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be ye lamps unto yourselves. Hold fast as a refuge to the truth. And whosoever shall be lamps unto themselves, it is they who shall reach the topmost height."

Fortunately the Saint got cured and they started again on their long journey. This time He proceeded to Pava. Here He accepted an invitation of a blacksmith and took food with him. From there he went to Kusinara near Gorakhpur. He fell ill. The disciples were all in great agony. The Buddha tried to console them. The Buddha said, "Enough. Weep no more. All things must perish. We must be separated from things we hold dear. You have done well. You have acquired much merit. Continue to strive and soon you will be free from the great evils. Think not when I am gone, "The Master is no more." Think not this. The Truth, the Law which I have taught you that shall be your Master, when I am gone."

Buddha's contribution in the spiritual awakening of man has been unique. His teachings have been simple. They are in local dialect *Magadhi* or Pali, free from the Sanskritised hurdles of expressions which are not accessible to the ordinary people. In *Dhammapada* clear cut guide lines are given. *Dhamma* is simple and ethical. One has "to abstain from evil, to accumulate what is good, and to purify one's mind". The emphasis is on *sila* or good conduct. One must lead a life of good conduct, attaining concentration to secure the balanced state of mind, that is, in His words *samadhi*. One must cultivate insight, that is *prajna* by understanding of the Four Noble Truths i.e. suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering. This can be done by following the Noble Eight Fold Path, which the Lord described always as the *Middle Path* as it avoided both the extremes of self indulgence and self-mortification. The Saint believed in the doctrine of *karma* and Rebirth. But he was averse to" "metaphysical speculation, for instance, about the origin or end of the Universe. He left some questions on the subject unexplained "because they are not of any use or benefit for a holy life, nor are they calculated to lead to detachment from the world, to a dispassionate state of mind, to cessation, or to *nirvana*."

Like Buddha's teachings, Buddha's philosophy too was quite simple. A great scholar has summed up the entire philosophy of this world Saint in three words; *anatman*, *anitya*, and *duhkha*.

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Buddha says "There is no such thing as a person or a living being, an ego, or a living entity which may be called a permanent soul. The notion of *atman* is a mere convention. Except *nirvana*, all things are evanescent or *anitya*, and so are painful, *duhkha* and devoid of any everlasting substance."

Buddha thought that this life covered the three planes of existence *Kama bhava* or desire, *rupa bhava* or form and *arupa bhava* or the formless. "Any individual moving in this round of life may be found to be moving in any of these three planes."

What about transmigration of soul? "If there is no soul that transmigrates from one life to another, how is it that the continuity of one and the same individual is maintained? Is there anything that passes from one life to another?"

It is here that the role of *karma* starts.

Karma continues till its force is exhausted. If a man starts a work and leaves the spot before the result is achieved, the result will not stop. It is a chain of actions and reactions. "The flame has not migrated from the candle to another and yet the flame of the new candle, could not have come into existence without the assistance given by the old candle."

One has to be one's own lamp.

"Therefore, O Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Be ye a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Hold fast as a refuge to the truth. And whosoever, Ananda, either now or after I am dead, shall be a lamp unto themselves and a refuge unto themselves, shall betake themselves to no external refuge, but holding fast to the truth as their lamp, and holding fast as their refuge to any one besides themselves—it is they, Ananda, among my *bhikkhus*, who shall reach the very topmost height! But they must be anxious to learn."

The most outstanding contribution of the Buddha was the formation of disciplines on scientific line. He was an Enlightened One. It was not necessary for Him to take any further trouble. He had attained *nirvana*, the highest stage of spiritual salvation and was therefore sure of relief from re-birth. And

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yet He could not rest there. He wanted mankind to be saved from suffering. He went from door to door Himself to spread the new message. It was to keep up this tradition and the flag flying that the Buddha formed the *Sangha*. He did it for the welfare of man. He was a prince. He had everything. He had the highest spiritual attainment. And yet why did He start the *Sangha*?

He was a practical world Teacher. He knew the salvation of an individual would not solve the problem. When the whole world is in agony, when the entire humanity is crying in pain, He must not rest in peace. So the *Sangha*.

Lord Buddha gave *Sangha* the same status as *Dharma*, the new faith. The Buddhist monks and nuns even today throughout the world utter the *mantra* where *Sangha* is given the same status as the Buddha and His *Dharma*.

So the success of the spread of the Master's message was in no way less due to the organisation—*Sangha*.

"The vast expansion of Buddhism, both inside and outside India, was in no small measure due to that remarkable institution, the *Sangha*, or the Order of monks and nuns. The Buddha devoted the major part of his activity to its organisation and it was, thus, his great practical achievement. This institution which became one of the great spiritual forces of the world has lasted across twenty five centuries to the present day."

The *Mahavagga* and *Chullavagga* of the *Vinaya Pitaka* furnish the story of the formation and development of the *Sangha*. The *Sangha* arose naturally out of the contemporary social conditions and its geowth was simple and spontaneous. After the conversion of the five ascetics at Sarnath to whom he preached his first sermon, the Buddha went to Varanasi and converted Yasa, the son of a wealthy merchant, who joined the Order, while his father, mother and wife became lay believers. Then came four and subsequently fifty friends of Yasa who joined the Order. "At that time" says the *Mahavagga*, "there were sixty-one *Arhats* in the world." The Buddha then addressed his followers and said: "Monks, I am delivered from all fetters, human and divine, and so are you. Go now and wander for the gain of many, for the welfare of many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain and for the welfare of gods and men. Let not two of you go the same way. Preach

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the doctrine which is glorious, glorious in the middle and glorious in the end, in the spirit and the letter, proclaim a consummate, perfect and pure life of holiness." The monks then went forth and returned with candidates for formal ordination. But seeing the difficulties involved in this procedure of ordination at his hands the Buddha authorised the ordained disciples to confer ordination without reference to himself.

The *Mahavagga* proceeds to relate the conversion by the Buddha of a thousand *Jatilas*, Brahmans ascetics with matted hair at Uruvela and of the two Brahmans, Sariputta and Maudgalyayana, and their two hundred and fifty companions, all followers of another celebrated teacher, Sanjaya, who were simultaneously encamping at Rajagriha. Sariputta and Maudgalyayana became the most celebrated and trusted disciples and assisted the Master in the management of *Sangha*. Unfortunately they died before the Master. Many of the young nobility also joined the Order, important among whom were Ananda who became the personal attendant of the Buddha and Upali, a barber of the Sakyas, who survived the Master and contributed materially in the codification of the *Vinaya Pitaka*.

As disciples multipled, the need for regulations and uniformity of life was felt. The *Mahavagga* and *Chullavagga* contain a large collection of regulations issued by the Buddha on such subjects as ceremonial, discipline, clothes, furniture and medicine. The basis of these rules and regulations is the *Patimokkha*, the ancient confessional formula which was read periodically to a congregation of the *Sangha* and those guilty of any sin had to confess it. Each incident and difficulty that arose was reported to the Buddha and he defined the correct practice. In the course of time many additions were made to the code and these were incorporated in other parts of the *Vinaya*.

Membership of the *Sangha* was not restricted by caste but slaves, soldiers, debtors and other persons under obligation or tutelage could not enter without the permission of their superior. Novices could be admitted from the age of eight upwards but they could qualify for full membership only at the age of twenty.

The rites of admission were simple and involved donning the three orange or yellow robes, ceremonially shaving the head and pronouncing the Three Jewels :

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Buddham sharanam gachchami
Dhammam sharanam gachchami
Sangham sharanam gachchami
I go for refuge to the *Buddha*, the Doctrine and the *Sangha*.

The ordained disciple was also required to observe the Ten Precepts, namely, abstention from :

harming living beings,
taking what is not given,
evil behaviour in passion,
false speech,
Sura, *meraya* and *majja* (alcoholic drinks) which cause carelessness,
eating at forbidden times (i.e. after mid-day),
dancing, singing, music and dramatic performances,
use of garlands, perfumes, unguents and jewellery,
use of high or broad bed,
receiving gold and silver.

These precepts were earnest resolves and not life-long vows. They were repeated regularly but any monk could leave the Order if he felt he could not comply with them.

The personal possessions allowed to a monk were : three robes, a waist-cloth, an alms-bowl, a razor, a needle and water-strainer (cloth). Everything else offered to him had to be handed over to the *Sangha*.

The monk had to beg his food from door to door in the morning and take it back to the monastery for his mid-day meal. As the monasteries became wealthy, however, the begging round was often reduced to a formality or altogether dropped.

The daily life of the monk was chiefly spent in study and religious exercises though he also took his share in the work of the upkeep of the monastery such as cleaning and sweeping.

An important spiritual exercise undertaken by the monks consisted of assuming for Four Sublime Moods or *Brahmavthara* in which, sitting cross-legged, they endeavoured to fill their minds with the four cardinal virtues of Buddhism—

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Maitri (love), *Karuna* (compassion), *Mudita* (joy) and *Upeksha* (serenity)—and to contemplate all living beings in the light of these virtues.

Every fortnight all the monks living within a parish, which had a defined boundary, assembled on the evenings of the full and new moons for *upavasatha* (*Pali*=uposatha) an act of general confession. The long list of monastic rules (Skr. *Pratimoks* Pali—Patimokkha) was read, and each monk confessed any breaches he had committed during the preceding fortnight. Serious cases of breaches were referred to a committee of elders, which might impose penance or order expulsion from the *Sangha*. The ceremony concluded with sermons which the laymen also attended.

During the nine months of the year the monks or *Bhikkhus* might wander about, live in the jungles or reside in a monastery. During the three months of the rains commencing from the day next to the full moon of *Ashadha* (June-July) or *Sravana* (July-August) they were required to taka up fixed abode and depend for their subsistence on the neighbouring householders. At the close of the retreat they assembled to confess their offences, if any, committed during the three months. This ceremony is called *pavarana*. At the end of the ceremony they accepted from the laity.

At first the *Sangha* consisted exclusively of men. It was after five years of its establishment that the entreaties of the Buddha's aunt and foster mother, Mahaprajapati, who had become a widow, and the intercession of Ananda persuaded the Buddha reluctantly to throw the *Sangha* open to women as well. The Buddha's objection to the entry of women into the *Sangha* were based neither on low estimate of female ability nor on the danger of corruption or immorality but on the fear that women might aspire to the management of the Order and to be the equal or superiors of the monks. The nuns wore yellow robes and shaved their heads like the monks and their discipline were very similar.

The Buddhist scriptures were chiefly written for and addressed to the monks and nuns of the Order, but a number of passages gave special instruction to the laymen. Certain precepts, however, were binding on the lay community only. An important Buddhist text of lay morality is addressed to

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Sigala in which the Buddha gives instructions to a young layman on his relations with his fellowmen and the duties of parents and children, teachers ond pupils, husbands and wives and friends. The sermon breathes a spirit of warm affection and fellowship not exalted to a spiritual level but of an everyday practical type. They were so dynamic in spirit and modern in approach that they sound valid even today. Such precepts, though implicit in the teachings of other religions, are nowhere else so clearly and unequivocally expressed. Specially note worthy are the duties of husbands to wives and of masters to servants which appear to anticipate the twentieth century ideas on the rights of women and employees, and which are valid in modern social order everywhere in the world even today.

The message of the great Saint had so tremendous effect on mankind that the royal authorities left aside their other duties and took special care not only to preserve it but to spread it further and refresh the agony-stricken world. In the process a rich literary treasure has been born.

Buddhism has been described perhaps in the largest number of languages in the world. They are distributed over so many languages. Some of the more important of these languages are Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, Apabhramsa and several Central Asian languages. It is not possible for any world scholar, however versatile, to go through all of them. From the point of 'compositeness and homogeneity' it is the Pali Canon alone which has survived in its entirety and has been made accessible to the wider public through its translation into English and other European languagcs.

Pali is one of the very importani early *Parkrits*, which was chosen by the Sthaviravadin Buddhlsts for recording the teachings of the Master. Buddha probably taught in *Magadhi* but as his doctorines spread over India they were adapted to the local dialects. Pali is still the religious language of the Buddhists of Ceylon, Burma and South East Asia.

According to Sinhalese tradition the Pali Canon was committed to writing in the reign of King Vattagamani (89-77 B.C.), after it had been finally approved at a great council of Sinhalese monks. It had, however, already been re-enacted and codified at the three councils of Rajagriha, Vaisali and Pataliputra and had been passed down by word of

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mouth over four centuries. The Pali Canon is commonly known by the name of *Tipitaka* (Skr. Tripitaka) or Three Baskets. These are *Vinaya, Sutta* and *Abhidhamma.*

Vinaya Pitaka comprises the following texts :

Patimokkha, Sutta Vibhanga, Khandhakas and *Parivara.* The *Vinaya Pitaka* contains pronouncement attributed to the Buddha, laying down numerous rules for the conduct of the order (*Sangha*). While the rules are contained in *Patimokkha,* the historical circumstances which led to their pronouncement are described in *Sutta Vibhanga.* The *Khandhakas* consist of two sections, *Mahavagga,* (great section) and *Chullavagga* (small section). Apart from dealing with such topics as the rules for admission to the Order and observance of fast days the *Mahavagga* also contains much valuable information on the everyday life of ancient India. For some parts of the Master's life it is almost a biography.

The largest and most important of the *Tipitakas* is the *Sutta Pitaka* which is divided into five groups or *Nikayas* :

Digha (Long) *Nikaya*
Majjhime (Medium) *Nikaya*
Samyutra (Connected) *Nikaya*
Anguttara (Graduated) *Nikaya*
Khuddaka (Minor) *Nikaya*

The first four collections of discourses are mostly attributed to the Buddha. The last *Nikaya* consists of miscellaneous treatises consisting of

Dhammapada
Udana
Itivuttaka
Khuddakapatha (A short anthology)

Dhammapada is an anthology of 423 sayings of the Buddha divided into 26 chapters.

Udana and *Itivuttaka* consists of utterances of the Buddha with attendant circumstances. *Kuddakapatha* is a short antho-

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logy. *Sutta-nipata* is a collection of poetic *sutta* in five chapters. *Theratha* is another collection of poems by monks in praise of the Buddha.

Similarly *Therigatha* is another compilation of poems by nuns. *Niddesa* is an old commentary on the latter half of Sutta-nipata attributed to Sariputta.

Jatakas are quite famous stories of the Buddha's previous births.

Patisambhida is a catechism on the doctrine.

Apadana is an anthology of heroic and pious works of Buddhist saints.

Buddhavasma is a collection of legends of the 24 Buddhas.

Vimanavatthu and *Petavatthu* are descriptions of celestial and infernal abodes respectively.

Cariya-Pitaka is a collection of *Jatakas* in verse.

The *Sutta-Pitaka* incorporates the greatest literary work of Buddha in prose and verse. The first four collections consist of the discourses which are either sermons of the Buddha preceded by a short introduction relating to the place and occasion of the discourses or dialogues in prose occasionally mixed with verse. The fifth, *Khuddaka Nikaya*, is the portion of the Pali scriptures which has found most favour with Europeans for it contains short treatises of remarkable beauty. To this division belongs the *Dhammapada* a celebrated anthology of devotional verses and the *Sutta-nipata*, a very ancient collection of *Suttas*, chiefly in metre. Other important works included in it are the *Theragatha* which are poems written by monks and the *Jatakas* or stories about Buddha's previous births.

The third *Pitaka Abhidhamma Pitaka* is known by the name of *Abhidhamma. Dhamma* stands for the doctrine of the Buddha and the prefix 'Abhi, signifies 'excess' and 'distinction'. Contrary to the implication in its name there is very little of metaphysics in this *Pitaka*. It deals with the same subjects as the *Sutta Pitaka*, but in a more scholastic way. The works comprised in this Pitaka are ; *Dhamma-Sanghani, Vibhanga, Kathavatthu, Puggala-Pannatti, Dhatu-Katha, Yamaka*, and *Patthama*. All these books are later in date and contain a more

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detailed and classified exposition of the doctrine than in the *Nikayas*. According to tradition the Buddha recited the *Abhidhamma* when he went to heaven to preach to the gods. Throughout the long history of Buddhism, this *Pitaka* has always been respected as the most profound portion of the scriptures and despite its dry pedanticism has not failed to attract students. This *Pitaka* includes *Kathavattu* or points of controversy attributed to *Tissa Mogaliputta*, President of the Third Council who is said to have composed it about 250 B.C. in Ashoka's reign.

There are collections of Buddhist scriptures in many other languages. All these were in addition to Pali. These holy scriptures have been described by some European writers as the *Canon*. But the various canons are not altogether similar and there is no clear standard for the inclusion or exclusion of particular works.

The Pali Text Society published scriptures which represent the canon of the ancient sect called *Vibhajjavadins* and the particular recension of it used at the Mahavihar Monastery in Anuradhapura (Ceylon). This recension is also accepted in Burma, Thailand and Cambodia as the undisputed version of the scriptures.

Most Buddhist sects of the two great schools *Mahayana* or Greater Vehicle and *Hinayana* or Lesser Vehicle, had their own versions of the three *Pitakas*. In most of the schools of *Mahayana*, however, their place was taken by later texts mostly composed in the early centuries of the Christian era. These are in Sanskrit, which became the religious language of the *Mahayana* school. In other parts of Asia, however, the local dialect was preferred. Many of these texts are sermons of the Buddha but of much greater length than those of the *Tripitaka* and are, therefore, known as *Vaipulya Sutras* or Expanded Sermons.

The *Mahayana* scriptures are so voluminous that not even the clergymen were expected to master any considerable part of them. According to Eliot, they "are the largest body of sacred writings extant in the world." Comparatively few of them have been translated into European languages and some exist only in Chinese or Japanese translations. A brief analysis of some of the principles *Mahayana* texts may be interesting.

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Prajnaparamita or transcendental knowledge is a generic name given to a body of literature consisting of treatises on the doctrine of *Sunyata*. They are classed as *sutras* and vary greatly in length. The great collection translated into Chinese is said to consist of 2,00,000 verses and to comprise sixteen different *sutras*. *Vajrachhedika* (Diamond-cutter) is one of the best known of these treatises.

Saddharmapundarika is one of the best known *Mahayana sutras* and is highly esteemed in China and Japan. It purports to be a discourse delivered by Sakyamuni to an assemblage of Bodhisattvas.

Lalitavistara is a flowery narrative of the Buddha's life, containing much more of the supernatural and miraculous than the Pali account.

Lankavatara Sutra is a lengthy text of great subtlety. It gives an account of the revelation of the Law by Sakyamuni when visiting Lanka.

Suvarnayrabhasa is a *Vaipulya Sutra* which insists on the supernatural character of the Buddha.

Gandavyuha preaches the doctrines of *Sunyata*, *dharmakaya* the omnipresence of the Buddha and the redemption of the world by the exertions of bodhisattvas.

Samadhiraja describes different forms of meditation of which the *Samadhiraja* is the best and the greatest.

Dasabhumisvara gives an account of the ten stages in the career of a bodhisattva before he can attain Buddhahood.

These eight works along with another *Tathagataguhyaka*, are extant in Sanskrit and are known in Nepal as the nine *dharmas*. Besides these numerous other *sutras* exist in Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan and the languages of Central Asia. There are also many compositions styled *Avadanas* or pious legends. These correspond in many respects to the Pali *Pitaka* but teach right conduct not so much by precept as by edifying stories. There are a dozen or more collections of *Avadanas* of which the most important are *Mahavastu* and *Divyavadana*.

"The *Sthaviravadin* commentators were probably hampered by the Buddha's injunctions against unnecessary speculatation and, accordingly, produced few works of systematic philosophy." The *Mahayana*, on the other hand, produced many. It had two chief philosophical schools, the *Madoyamika* and the

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Yogacera. The *Madhyamkarika* of Nagarjuna formed the basic text of the former school while the *Sutralankara* of *Asanga* was the earliest text of the latter.

From time to time the Buddhist scholars had to hold councils to revise and coordinate the religious text which through interpretations and understanding through the ages needed updating and mutual co-ordinated approach. So far six such councils have taken place during the last 2500 years. These councils were "some sort of codfederations of autonomous local Sanghas." They were discussed and accepted on a democratic approach. Here is an instance. When the first Buddhist Council, held immediately after the death of the Buddha, was about to conclude, Purana and his disciples from the Southern Hills arrived. Purana was asked to accept the version of the Master's teachings as approved by the Council to which he replied, "The *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* have been well sung by the Theras, nevertheless as they have been received and heard by me from the mouth of the Lord, so will I hold them."

But the Buddha, because of the supreme position which He held in the organisation and the love and respect that He enjoyed from His disciples, functioned, so long He was alive, as a final arbiter for all major questions of dogma and discipline. The Sanghas, however, were free to interpret and decide minor and lesser precepts. No need was felt to ascertain the implications of the phrase 'minor precepts' so long the Buddha was alive. In the first Council when Ananda was asked if he had asked the Master what he meant by the term, he confessed not having done so. Ananda came in for a good deal of criticism for his failure.

This state of affairs was in a large measure responsible for the different and sometimes conflicting interpretation of the Buddha's teachings. Attempts have been made from time to time by Buddhist Councils to preserve the texts in their pristine purity by ridding them of their accretions.

The First Council was held immediately after the death of the Buddha (probably in 483 B.C.) at the Satapanni Cave near Rajagriha (Bihar). Most probably a decision to convene this Council was taken at Kusinagar at the time of the death of the Buddha. Nearly 500 monks took part in the deliberations.

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Each text was recited by an elder, sentence by sentence, which was intoned by the entire gathering as a mark of approval. The *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* received the approval of the Council in this manner. Upali was the principal authority for the *Vinaya* and Ananda for the *Dhamma*. There is no reference to *Abhidhama* which in all probability received its form and shape later on.

The Second Council was convened about hundred years after the death of the Buddha (probably in 376 B.C.) at Vaishali. It is said that some *Bhikkhus* of Vajjian lineage and resident of Vaishali had developed a doctrine which was inconsistent with the primitive and pure Buddhism. They were accepting gold and silver from their followers, permitted their disciples to cite the examples of their Preceptors in defence of their own conduct and to hold *Uposutha* in separate companies and not as one united body. These practices were first discovered by a monk by name Yasa while he was at Vaishali.

He had a quarrel with these monks of Vaishali and later approached the elders of south and west. The Second Council rejected the heretical opinions and practices of the Vaishali monks.

The Third Council was held during the reign of Ashoka at Pataliputra. (According to one opinion, it was held in 251 B.C.; according to another, it was held in 240 B.C.). Buddhism, because of the patronage that it was receiving from the state, attracted a number of adherents. Even some "heretics", without forsaking their heresies, returned to it. The Third Council was, therefore, held to protect the true faith from such heretical opinions and cults. It was at this meeting that the Buddhist text—*Vinaya*, *Dhamma* and *Abhidhama*—were given their final shape.

The Fourth Council was held during the reign of Kaniska at Kundalavana monastery in Kashmir. After his conversion to Buddhism, Kaniska found numerous Buddhist cults growing side by side. The example of Ashoka, on whom he wanted to model himself, was already there. He, therefore, convened a Council which was attended by 500 monks. It was presided over by Parsva. A number of other scholars, Asvagosha, Visvamitra and Nagarjuna, participated in the deliberations. Elaborate commentaries of all the three *Pitakas*—each running into

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1,00,000 stanzas—were compiled by the Council. It also compiled a Buddhiste ncyclopaedia called the *Maha Vibhasa*. At the end, as stated by Hiuen Tsang, "Kaniska raja ordered these discourses to be engraved on sheets of red copper, He enclosed them in a stone receptacle and, having sealed them, he raised over it a stupa with scriptures in the middle."

The *Mahayana*—the Greater Vehicle-school of Buddhism received a great impetus from the decisions and deliberations of the Fourth Council. The Council in fact was entirely dominated by the followers of the *Mahayana* school of Buddhism prevalent in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand and Indo-China. There are a number of factors which helped the growth and development of the *Mahayana* school, the most important being the converts from among the orthodox Brahmins and foreigners.

The Fifth Council was held in Burma during 1868-71 King Mindomin's chief ambition in life was to be known as the convener of the Fifth Council. The Council which was held entirely due to the efforts of the King, recited the texts on the lines of the past Councils and established the correct version of the *Tripitakas*.

The Sixth Council took place in Rangoon in May 1954 in a cave built at a cost of Rs. 90 lakh inside the World Peace Pagoda. About 2,500 monks from Thailand, Cambodia, Viet, Nam, Indonesia, Loas, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Nepal, and Burma participated in the Council with a view to revising and codifying the *Tripitakas*.

It was only by dint of His deep spiritual power, realised through constant prayers, penance and purification of the soul that He became the Enlightened One. It became a big power house from which tens of millions drew their spiritual strength. Buddhism became a world religion. The words of the great Saint are expressed in perhaps the largest number of languages throughout the globe.

The messages of the Master are so relevant even today. They will be relevant till the end of civilisation. The whole picture is yet so fresh. When one reads a message of the Master one feels as if He is standing before him and giving the guidance like a father to the son. It is so vivid, so clear and so refreshing to the mind. It gives peace instantaneously. Words fails to describe His greatness.

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One may pray, as in the hymn composed by the World Poet Rabindranath Tagore :

The world today is wild with the delirium of hatred, the
the conflicts are cruel and unceasing in anguish,
Crooked are its paths, tangled its bonds of greed,
All creatures are crying for a new birth of thine,
One thou of boundless life, save them, rouse thine eternal
voice of hope,
Let Love's lotus with its inexhaustible treasure of honey
Open its petals in thy light.
O Serene, O Free,
In thine immeasurable mercy and goodness
Wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth.
Thou giver of immortal gifts
Give us the power of renunciation
and claim from us our pride
In the splendour of a new sunrise of wisdom
let the blind gain their sight
And let life come to the souls that are dead.
O Serene, O Free,
In thine immeasurable mercy and goodness
wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth.
Man's heart is anguished with the fever of unrest,
with the poison of self-seeking,
with a thirst that knows no end.
Countries far and wide flaunt on their foreheads
the blood-red mark of hatred.
Touch them with thy right hand,
make them one in spirit,
bring harmony into their life,
bring rhythm of beauty.
O Serene, O Free,
In thine immeasurable mercy and goodness
wipe away all dark stains from the heart
of this earth.

No single soul has ever left such a great imprint in the cultural heritage of so many countries of the world. The

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Buddhist literature has enriched the most important world languages. The social barrier of age old casteism, the time-honoured mutilated rituals, the inaccessibility to religious scriptures because of the difficult expressions through old Sanskrit language, all had been set aside, and not with any spirit of vengeance but just effortlessly. The whole thing took place so peacefully that none can deny its dramatic touch on world civilisation.

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SAINT THOMAS

(— 73 A.D.)

Almost all religious ideas were born in India. The major religions of the land—Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh had their origin in India. Among the most important other major religious groups are Islam and Christianity. Both these major religions had come through great saints who became part and parcel of the land. They spread the noble ideas of the Almighty. The first saint who spread actively the message of the Holy Prophet was Muinuddin Chisti who came to India and never returned home. He made India his home. India embraced him as a loving son. Today the saint occupies a high place in the cultural history of the land as the pioneer who preached the universal brotherhood of man, the highest message of the Prophet. Islam is the second largest popular faith. Hazrat Muinuddin Chisti is loved, respected and worshipped not only by the Muslims as in tune with cultural harmony of the land, the saint is also an object of great esteem to people from all other faiths. Today in his *urs* at Ajmer thousands throng from all religious groups to pay homage to the saint.

Similarly another great faith, Christianity is a living religion in India. Christians have been playing equally imoportant roles in the cultural synthesis of the great land of unity in diversity. Not only that Christians are attached to the Lord, the holy message of Christ has influenced the lives, works and philosophies of some of the greatest saints of the land-past and present. Great saints like Madhvacharya talked about "eternal hell", a description never discussed in earlier thoughts and proves beyond doubt the influence of the contemporary Christian missioneries carrying the message of Christ on the coastal lands. Of present generations, majority of the saints, including Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda had been following the teachings of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna, who Himself practised all the major religions of the world regularly

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prayed before him. There used to be a picture of Christ and Buddha, each regularly worshipped by the saint in His dwelling apartment at Dakshineswar.

In the spread of education and culture, the contribution of Christian missioneries during the last few centuries had been far more than anybody else.

It is interesting, in a book on Spirit of Indian culture to record the immortal name of the saint who brought the message of Christ to this holy land and made it a part of our mainstream of homogenous philosophy. There are, of course theories too that the Lord Himself lived at Kashmir and meditated. There are also theories that Jesus came to Varanasi and learnt many contemporary subjects. That is only left to historians to explore. Ikbal Kaul is working on the subjects. Some of the papers written by him on the subject had been received with great enthusiasm. India will be too glad to find the event a historic truth.

Who was first to bring the message of the lofty thoughts of Christianity to India ?

It was a great man Saint Thomas, one of the twelve Christian Apostles. Born probably in Galilee, His names vary from country to country. Both in Aramaic and Greek—the names being *Te'oma* and *Didymos* mean twin. He is described also as Judas Thomas which again means *Judas the Twin* by the Syrians. In India *Dwija*, the twice born is a respectable terminology.

"Thomas' character is outlined in the Gospel. According to John, his devoted love for Jesus is clearly expressed in John 11 : 5-16 : when Jesus planned to return to Judaea, the disciples warned him of the Jews' animosity ('now seeking to stone you') to which Thomas soon replied, 'Let us also go, that we may die with Him'."

It is further observed about the saint, "at the Last Supper (John 14 : 1-7) Thomas could not comprehend what Jesus meant when he said, "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way where I am going". The saint asked the Lord, "how can we know ? The Lord said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life".

The saint was lucky to "touch" the Lord after *Resurrection*.

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The Lord appeared physically to remove the devotee's doubts. And in ecstasy the saint swooned with the words "My Lord and My Lord'".

That was indeed a historic utterance.

India is proud to have the touch of this great saint who in the whole world was "the first person to explicity acknowledge Christ's divinity".

He was a wandering minstrel of God. He left for Khurasan from where he came to India. He is recognised as the founder of the Church of the Syrian Malabar Christians, or *Christians of St. Thomas.* Among his most popular work is *the Gospel of Thomas.* The most authentic biography of the saint is perhaps A E Medlycott's *India and Apostle Thomas.*

According to all available material St. Thomas came to India AD 52. He "came to Malabar after preaching to the inhabitants of the island of Socotra and establishing there Christian community, and he landed at the ancient port of Cranganore—Mayiri Khodu or Muziris of Ptolemy and the Periplus in AD 52". This is only according to traditions and Medlycott in his *Saint Thomas Christians* writes, "these Christians had no written rccords of ancient history, but relied entirely on traditions handed down by their elders and to these they are most tenaciously attached".

In India, it was mainly in Kerala where the saint limited his activities. It was mainly in the coastal areas, where Jewish merchants would concentrate, that the great saint would spread the message of the Master.

The intention of his visit to India was not to convert anybody. He was accompanying Habban an Indian merchant to Indian soil. Juda Thomas was an expert carpenter. Before coming to India he was imprisoned at Khorasan for spending the money given, perhaps as advance towards some building in charity. That might have been also the reason for the good hearted man to leave that country. In any case, Saint Thomas's visit to India was a great event in the cultural renaissance of the land. A happy blending of all higher thoughts always lend new vigour to the existing philosophy of life of any nation.

There are some scholars who believe that Saint Thomas

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came to India much earlier than 52 AD. May be there is some truth in it. According to this School the saint first came to Punjab. "St. Thomas may have preached the *Gospel* and founded the Church in Persia long before he accompanied Habban to the Parthian Kingdom of the Punjab. For if, as scholars believe, he came to India in AD 48 or 49, there is a gap of about fifteen years in the Apostle's life to be accounted for. Could we not presume that he spent years in the field originally assigned to him ? How else can we explain the existence from the earliest times of Christian communities in Persia with a Metropolitan Bishop in the Province of Fars and Bishops in the various islands of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea ? How else can we explain the stand taken by this Metropolitan and Bishops of the region when they refused to accept directives from the Patriarch of Seleucia—Cresiphon on the ground that they are "the disciples of the Apostle Thomas and have nothing in common with the See of Man's" (that the Patriarch) exactly like the Syrian Christians of Malabar ? We may find a common link between these two Christianities of St. Thomas in that, till the end of the 8th century the Metropolitan of Fars exercised jurisdiction over the Malabar Christians as well."

(*The Catholic Church in India—A Historical Sketch*, page 5)

There should be least doubt about the date of the arrival of the Saint now after two thousand years. The very fact that India celebrated the nineteenth centenary of his advent in 1952 should confirm the majority view of the Apostle's arrival.

During his stay for more than twenty years the saint had endeared himself with the masses. He dressed like an Indian *Sannyasi*. He served all, particularly the poor, irrespective of caste or creed. He was extremely popular with whomever he came in touch and it was but obvious that the local priest class did not see eye to eye with him on that account. They considered him as a strong rival and wanted to belittle him by even poisoning the ears of the ordinary men.

Some scholars have come out with the theory that Saint Thomas first came to Punjab and not Kerala. They have come out with their arguments which are equally valid. That is not however mentioned in the most authentic records. *Acts of Thomas* say it otherway round.

According to all sources available, St. Thomas came to

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India along with an Indian merchant Habban. *Acts of Thomas* records tell us "Then a certain merchant, an Indian, called Habban 'happened to come into the south country' sent by Gudnaphar to procure for him a skilful carpenter. Our Lord appeared to Habban and sold St. Thomas to him for twenty pieces of silver. Travelling by ship they put in at the town of Sandaruk. They disembark at this port, and attend the wedding of the King's only daughter. At the wedding they see a Hebrew girl playing the flute and St. Thomas ultimately converts the bride and the bridegroom".

(*A History of Christianity in India, pages* 25-26)

According to another source, "Thomas and Habban probably sailed up the Nile from Alexandria, and cut across the desert to the Red Sea port of Myos Hermes, where they may have taken ship to Pattala at the mouth of the Indus, and then gone up the Indus to Attock and overland to the capital city, the famous Taxila. The Acts mention his arrival there in the month of Dius (October-November). It is difficult to sift the grain from the chaff in the wonderous narrative. We may take it that thanks to the influence of Habban the King allowed Thomas to preach not only to the Jewish settlers but also to his subjects in general. He seems to have greatly impressed the local people by his holy life, which is thus described to the king by his subjects.

"He goeth about the cities and countries, and whatsoever he hath, he giveth to the poor and teacheth of a new God, and healeth the sick and driveth out devils, and doth many other wonderful things, and we think him to be a sorcerer. Yet his compassioned his cures which are done by him freely, and moreover the simplicity and kindness of him and his faith, do declare that he is a righteous man or an apostle of the new God whom he preacheth; for he fasteth continuously and prayeth, and eateth bread only with salt, and his drink is water, and he weareth but one garment alike in fair weather and in winter, and receiveth nought of any man and what he hath he giveth unto others". This was exactly hundred percent what an ordinary Indian would like to accept as his ideal. This was exactly how the simple, sincere, serene life of Muinuddin Chisti

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of Ajmer had attracted huge crowd. There is so great a similarity between an ideal Indian Saint's life and the lives of Saint Thomas and the great Chisti of Ajmer that an ordinary, even unlettered Indian would not care even to know whether he is a Muslim, or a Christian or a Hindu. He is attracted by the spirit of renunciation, by the spirit of spiritual adventure and he would invariably automatically surrender hemself at his feet and ask for his guidance. The curiosity for the unknown, the love for the unexplored, the attachment to the very divine thought is so much ingrained in the mind of an ordinary Indian, is so irresistible, that like in a flood he is emotionally immediately carried away by the new wave—He takes the path finder as his own.

So long, the saint was preaching to the Jewish merchants in India who were "numerous" in Malankara near Musiris. Quite a number of Nambudiri Brahmins came under his influence here. "We may take it that he did not engage in philosophical discussions, which may be the native element of the race but which was alien to a Palestinian like Thomas". Normally, in India, there are religious debates and detailed discussions and whoever is defeated in arguments accepts the faith of the victor. In this particular case it was not so. It seems the saint won them by showing them some miracle. History also confirms that. It is recorded clearly, "The tradition is that he won them over by performing a miracle which proved that the God of the Jewish *Sadhu* was mightier than their own. It is a pretty story".

The story may be recalled in brief.

"Passing by the city of Palur, a Brahminical stronghold, early in the morning he found a large number of *Brahmins* bathing in the tank of the temple chanting *Vedic* verses and throwing water into the air. Asked why they were doing this, they said it was an offering to the Gods. "In that case", the Apostle said, "Your offerings do not seem to be acceptable to them. Otherwise the water would not have fallen back into the tank".

"The Brahmins retorted by asking if he could keep the water drops in the air. Thomas said he would, provided that, if he did, they would accept his Lord as true God. This they promised never expecting the law of gravity to fail. But the

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Apostle threw up handfuls of water, which, to their amazement, remained in mid-air glistening in the sun. Most of the Brahmins kept the promise and accepted the faith, while the rest cursed the place and left Palur".

It is further maintained "The higher castes among the Malabar Christians of today trace their descent from the Palur Brahmins, and among them four families claimed from the earliest times, the right of priesthood, like the Levites of Israel. The Office of the highest dignitary—The *Arch deacon* was hereditary in the *Pakalamattam* family. He was the hierarchical head of the Kerala Church whenever the *See* was vacant, the Bishops coming usually from Persia or Chaldea".

So there was nothing unnatural that such a great soul, an ideal saint would attract a large number of crowd who would collect before him for spiritual path finding. His simple habits, his gentle demeanour, his austere way of living, his sacrifice for the poor, the great compassion for all and above all the very charm of his personality was respected by one and all. People who were curious for a God must have been attracted by the new God of this new *Sadhu.*

He had miraculous power to heal diseases. We are told in *Seventh Act* "How Judas Thomas was called by the General of King Mazdai to heal his wife and daughter".

"And while Judas was preaching throughout all India" General Sifur, who speaks of himself as a great man, throughout India, came to him. St. Thomas left his converts under the care of his deacon Xantippus (Xenophon) and set out with Sifur. They went with a *driver* in a *chariot* drawn by cattle. They reached the city of King Mazdai, and the Apostle healed the General's wife and daughter".

According to most reliable sources, the Saint started religious activities mainly by founding churches. The saint founded seven churches at Cranganore, Palur, North Parur, South Pallipuram, Niranam, Nellapul and Quilon. These are mentioned in the history of churches "This number cannot be dismissed as symbolical as some of these churches have accounts of their foundation that are far from being mere imaginary fiction".

(Hambye : *Saint Thomas and India,*
The Clergy Monthly Vol. XVI, p. 26)

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Although the saint visited a number of places in the country serving the diseased and healing them through his power of miracle, his main field of activities was the whole of *Chera*, modern Kerala. A large number of people embraced his faith "including near relatives of the Perumal (*Raja*).

Saint Thomas was a zealous devotee of the Lord and according to tradition sailed for China. As the records say "Eager to carry the Word to all nations as his Master had commanded the courageous Thomas, is also said to have sailed to China, possibly in a Chinese trading junk". From China he returned to Malabar.

Like all Indian Saints devoted to God Almighty, Saint Thomas was a great disciplined organiser. "He established the Church on a sound basis, crossed the *Ghats*, and continued his preaching through the Kingdoms of the *Pandyans* and the *Cholas*, winning over large numbers by his saintly life and the wonders he performed. The success of his mission was bound to rouse the hostility of the priests who having vainly tried to discredit him at last put him to death near a temple of *Kali* on the little mount near Mylapore, Madras, according to tradition, on 3rd July 72 AD, a man loved and revered by all, from the King to the *Pariah*".

It was a sad incident. In the words of a poet,

One day, when preaching to the fold he stood
They feigned a quarrel mid the mob to rise
Already Christ His Holy man eudow'd
With saintly martyrdom that opens the skies.
Rained innumerable stones the crowd
Upon the victim, sacred sacrifice
And last a villain, hastier than the rest
Pierced with a cruel spear his godly breast
Wept Ganges and Indus, true Thome! Thy fate
Wept thee whatever lands thy foot had trod,
Yet weep thee more the souls in blissful state
Thou ledst to don the robes of Holy Road.

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According to the Greek Church, however, the date was October 6. The Edessan Church confirms July 3 as the real date.

There are different versions of the Saint's death. In the Malabar legends about Saint Thomas there is one in which the Brahmins near Cranganore are represented as "stoning the saint and leaving him dead."

There are other versions of the Saint's death. According to one of them "it was the result of an accident rather than that of a deeply laid Brahminic conspiracy. A *govi*, or an untouchable, having shot an arrow at a peacock, it by chance struck the saint in the right side and killed him instantly. These scapegoats were so profoundly impressed by the guilt of their ancestors, that on no account could they be induced to enter Mylapore. As Marco Polo says, 'Nothing on earth would induce them to enter the place—where Messer St. Thomas is—I mean where his body lies, which is in a certain city of the province of Ma'bar. Indeed, were twenty or thirty men to lay hold of one of these *govis* and try to hold him in the place where the body of the blessed Apostle of Jesus Christ lies, they could not do it. Such is the influence of the saint; for it was by people of this generation that he was slain".

(*History of Christianity in India, page 50*)

The sad event of the Saint's death was not a new event in India. Many great saints had been killed or many plots were hatched to kill even local great saints. In some cases even one of their preceptors—as for instance in the case of Ramanujacharya, his own *Guru* Yadavaprakash wanted to kill his most illustrious disciple for two reasons. First, he was jealous of his extra-ordinary brilliance and was afraid that he would surpass him. And secondly, he was opposed to *Advaitavad.* Ramanujacharya was an exponent of *Vishishtadvaitavada.* However he was miraculously saved by his cousin Govinda. A favourite disciple of Sankaracharya was almost on the point of getting the Guru sacrificed before *Kali.* He too was saved by another disciple miraculously. Nobody knows how the Saint disappeared finally. Nobody knows how Mahaprabhu Sri Krishna Chaitanya disappeared from this world. Great

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Saints have their messages to preach. Villains are also there to stand in their ways. Indian philosophy and culture do not believe in elimination. She stands for assimilation. India stands for harmony, synthesis and not dissension.

It has been truly observed by George Mark Moraes that "The tomb of St. Thomas had in the meanwhile become a centre of pilgrimage for Christians and non Christians alike. Thus in the second decade of the sixteenth century, Duarte Barbosa, who saw the tomb, crowded by pilgrims, wrote :

"He (the saint) lies very modestly in the church which his disciples built for him. The Muslims and Hindus used to burn lights on it, each one claiming it as his own. The church is arranged in our fashion with crosses on the altar and on the summit of the vault, and a wood engraving and peacocks as devices, but it is now very ruinous, and all around it covered with brushwood, and a poor Muslim holds charge of it and begs alms for it, for which a lamp is kept burning at night, and on what is left they live. Some Indian Christians go there on pilgrimage and carry away many relics, litttle earthen balls from the same tomb of the Blessed St. Thomas".

(Quoted in *A History of Christianity in India,*

From Early Times to St. Francis Xavier
AD 52—1542, page 48)

According to the Portuguese historian Gaspan Correa, "the Shrine was so greatly venerated that it was held in the highest esteem. Far, on their festival days, the Hindus would bring their images accompanied by large crowds and great rejoicing, and would, as they approached the door of the church, lower them three times to the ground as a mark of reverence to it, a practice which had been followed from time immemorial."

(Correa, *Lendas da India*, page 724)

Pilgrims visiting Mylapore have left beautiful descriptions. "The local people called it Mylapore or Pavam, Mylapore

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meaning *the city of the peacock* from *Mayura*—changed into *Malia* by the Tamilians for reasons of metathesis, while *pavam* in their own parlance meant peacok".

Marco Polo mentions that the practice of taking a handful of mud from the grave was used as a potion against illness. Mylapore became a pilgrimage known throughout the world.

In 883 when the Anglo Saxon Chronicle was written, India was mentioned as a holy land. It is mentioned there "Sighaln and Aethalstan conveyed to Rome the alms which the King, Alfred had vowed to send thither, and also to India, to St. Thomas and St. Bartholmew". Many gifts were sent by Alfred to St. Thomas in India by sea.

There is a fourth version of his death, martyrdom. "In the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, originally composed in Syriac, his martyrdom is cited under the king of Mylapore at Madras, where are St. Thomas Mount and San Thome Cathedral—his traditional burial place; his relics, however, supposedly were taken to the West and finally enshrined at Ortona, Italy."

Saint Thomas is not dead. He lives among millions of his followers in the world. He was a Godman. He lived and died for and faith he bore so near to his heart. Not only the Christians of the land, people of all faiths bow their heads almost every day at his Mount Tomb at Mylapore at Madras. Each sigh by a pilgrim touches the lamenting sky for the last nineteen hundred years. It is a protest against a mad man who tarnished the image of his own sect and land. That does not represent the voice of the land. St. Thomas is the only Apostle whose tomb, India is proud to preserve in the great holy land.

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ACHARYA APPAR

(600 AD—680 AD)

Shiva has been worshipped in India for the last five thousand years. There are historical proofs of the existence of the *Shiva* cult in India as early as 3000 B.C.

One of the great Saints in South India who devoted his life to preach *shaivism* was Tirunavukkarasu, popularly known as Appar. The word Tirunavukkarasu means the blessed king of speech. The saint was known also as *Vagisa* which means the Lord of *Vac* or speech. The word *Appar* means father. The Saint had a younger friend Sambandha who was equally powerful. He was younger to the Saint by thirty nine years. So he used to call his senior colleague and trusted spiritual friend *Appar* or father. "Since then this appellation has generally come into vogue. Inspite of their disparity in age and caste the two became intimate and life long friends."

The Saint had to his credit forty nine thousand decades of hymns of which three hundred and eleven are extant.

Appar was born in 600 AD in a rich Vellala family in a village called Tiruvamur in the South District of Arcot. His father's name was Pugazhanar and mother's Madiniar. Appar, Tirunavukkarasu or *Vagisa* all the three were mere attributes to the Saint. They were not his names. His real name, almost forgotten in history of philosophy, was Marulneekkiar.

In India brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers played their individual roles in the lives of great path finders. To Gyaneswar his elder brother was the *Guru* and main guide. To Bama Khyapa it was the elder sister. To most others it was the mother. In the case of Acharya Appar it was his dear elder sister, who reached almost sainthood through single minded devotion to *Shiva* and played the role of almost a *Guru*.

Appar's elder sister, whose name was Tilakavatiyar, betrothed to Kalippagai Nayanar, a commander in the army suddenly faced triple tragedies in life. Her would be husband

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was urgently recalled to battlefield suddenly. The poor commander died valiantly before his wedding. The sad parents Pagazhanar and Madiniar died of shock. Tilakavatiyar lost all interests in life. She was "so much overwhelmed with grief that she wished to put an end to her own life." The child, young brother Marulneekkiar, an orphan felt absolutely helpless. "Appar fell at her feet and pleaded with her that she should live for his sake. Her love for her little brother ultimately gave her some consolation and she decided to live for his sake."

The darling sister shaped the spiritual career of the child brother.

There were four great *Shaiva acharyas* in South India, "who represent the four main paths of *Shaivism*, *viz* the paths of *charya*, *kriya*, *yoga* and *jnana* otherwise known as the *Dasamarga Satputra* i.e. the path of the servant, the path of the good son, the path of the friend and the good (true) path. These paths are respectively represented by Tirunavukkarasu (Appar), Jananasambandha Sundara Murti, and Manikkavachaka. The first three names are in historical order too. *Sat marga* was the first to appear, although according to some he was the last. In the myriads of *Shiva* temples in South India, their images are found side by side, though slightly varying in their order, that of Manikkavachaka being invariably the fourth."

Appar holds a unique position in the spiritual life of India, specially south India and is worshipped even today as a great devotee who was blessed by *Shiva* more than once. He was an enlightened path finder.

Suffering led him to sainthood. Appar hailed from a rich family. Suffering is not restricted to poverty alone. A rich man is equally victim of suffering. In original Bengali *Geetanjali* Tagore has rightly described suffering as a touch of divinity—*aghat say jay parash tobo sai to puraskar*. They strike present, the holy touch, that's the reward. So says Anatole France, "Pain is the lamentable part of this earth of ours. We spin unceasingly the web of sorrow. It is our hell, tribulation, but it is also our greatness. If man builds at all, it is at the price of endless efforts and tears. If he were happy, he would be as though he existed not. If he were prosperous he would not progress.

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Everyone finds a pedestal on which to raise himself and the name of that pedestal is suffering".

So as it goes in the great life of Appar and his sister. "This crisis in their life paved the way for their sainthood. When one's world is in ruins, one naturally turns within and seeks God's compassion."

Appar was in great agony. His mind was revolting against the presiding deity in their house—*Shiva*. Why should all knowing, all pervading one be so cruel with him and his sister? They had not done any harm to anybody. They were simple-hearted innocent worshippers of God. Why should such a calamity befall on them?

He was restless. Appar was an outstanding student of extraordinary merit. The elder sister, a seeker of knowledge and the divine light, took keen care of the brilliant brother's education. He was admitted to a sanskrit school in the village. For him it was quite easy to cross the stages of elementary education. He had attracted attention of both the teachers and the colleagues by his sparkling brilliance.

The elder sister was the biggest teacher in the child's life. With nothing else to fall back upon, the loving sister devoted her whole-hearted attention to the training of the talented brother who was to be a great scholar. She would take pains to tell him the stories of Indian mythology—the epics, the *Puranas*, lives of great sages and seers and would enliven the curiosity of the child in the spiritual realm. Thus she opened the window of a mystic world before a brilliant mind which had already been stirred to a mystic world by circumstances. He had already been peeping to mysticism. Why this earth? What is the worth of human life? Why such sufferings? Why good people should get dashed against suffering and sorrow?

The sister had already made some good progress in spiritual life. She had already been initiated by a great *Shaiva Guru*. She spent all her time in *Shiva* temple in meditation, prayer and repetition of the Holy name of *Shiva*.

The sister was fascinated by the sweet devotional hymns by the earlier saint, Manikkavachaka. She appointed a scholarly lady to recite them before her and specially before the younger brother. It was the beginning of training. "Manikkavachaka stood for the worship of the one supreme Lord and declared that

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scriptural texts, fasts and penances, rites and ceremonies—logic and metaphysics and the most exertion of the human self could not by themselves take the soul to the feet of the Almighty; the most efficacious way of making the Infinite reach out its hand to the depths of finite was the way of love—pure, unselfish love welling forth from the depths of one's being."

Manikkavachaka's words were like pearls. The saint brother became a great scholar and had influenced the spritual life even of the royal court. He was so learned that even when he was within his teens his fame reached far and wide. Even as a person he was known for his sound character and honest integrity. This "reached the ears of the Pandya monarch. The king sent for the young man, tested him and appointed him forthwith his Chief Minister. But even in the height of his power and influence he pined for the vision of God." Appar's sister made arrangement to recite regularly Manikkavachaka's *Tiruvachakam* which is described as "the fountain head of all later devotional poetry in the Tamil land."

Appar would, along with the dear sister, listen to this divine *stotramalas* with rapt attention. His mind would wander in an altogether different world.

Appar thought of visiting Kanchi for higher education. The sister got worried. Her plan was different. She had been thinking of sending the loving brother to Chidambaram. There were deeply significant reasons for that. Kanchi was the capital of Raja Mahendra Verma a devout Jain. It was the headquarter of Jainism in the South. The intelligent sister knew the nerves of the brother. She knew there would be attempt to brain wash the promising young boy. He might embrace Jainism. She insisted on Appar's joining some higher educational centre at Chidambaram, the main centre for the *Shaiva* scholars.

Appar did not listen to his elder sister. He did not like to restrict his thoughts only to any particular sect. He wanted to join some university at Kanchipuram, the biggest centre of learning in south India. He explained everying to his sister and pleaded for a more liberal outlook.

The affectionate sister had to yield to his desire. So Appar left for Kanchipuram. The royal patronage had given many facilities to Jain scholars who came from north India in

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numbers and guided scholars in studies in depth on the philosophy of Mahavira.

It was quite natural that such a brilliant student would draw attention of all. That was anticipated. The bright student's fame spread like wild fire. Raja Mahendra Varma too got interested in him. As the elder sister anticipated, Appar got initiated to Jainism by the royal spiritual preceptor at the exceedingly happy initiative of the king. The king felt exceedingly happy. He earmarked the young scholar as the spiritual preceptor of the Jaina order. His entire plan succeeded.

Appar just did not embrace Jainism for nothing. That great faith and philosophy had also its root in the Indian soil. It had the massage of peace in the mind stormed by turmoils of circumstances. The heart had a reason.

A sad child that the orphan boy Appar was, "he turned to relgious studies for consolation; tried social service to comfort his soul, helping in digging tanks, feeding pilgrims and doing numerous acts of neighbourly kindness. But he remained disconsolate. He began to feel that the religion of his forefathers and traditional practices were futile, for though he had followed them faithfully, he had only met with calamities and disappointments." The biographer says "those were the days when the Jains and Jainism flourished and many had joined the Jains deserting their ancestral faith. Appar too fell attracted by the preaching of universal love and renunciation by Jainism. He became a convert without consulting his sister and joined a Jain monastery at Tiruppapulyur. His new name was Dharmasena." As a brilliant student he made a study in depth on Jain philosophy. He became a missionery monk !

The sister lost all hopes in life. Poor lady had no one else in her life. She lost her prarents before her wedding with the gallant would-be husband who had died on the battlefield. The only hope, the young bright brother, too, more or less deserted her. It was a great shock, a bigger one than all previous ones. She felt she had been deceived by the loving one on whom she was so hopefully banking, turned out to be building a castle in the air. Her ideas of making a great shaiva Saint out of the younger brother simply dashed against the ground. She felt utterly frustrated. But a devotee never loses heart. One who is completely identified oneself with God will never accept a defeat. The

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sister too did not accept defeat. She changed her strategies. It was a spiritual war in which she finally won.

An Indian woman has bottomless love. It may be for the husband, the brother or the father. The mother of Balananda Brahmachari, Narmadabai left her food, sleep and even personal salvation and prayed to *Shiva* for long forty years in search of her only son. She got him. The sister now devoted herself heart and soul only to get the young brother out of the 'clutch' of royal religion and get him back to her fold. All her prayers to *Shiva* now centered round only on one boon from the Almighty. She somehow felt that it would certainly succeed one day.

Appar could not live without meeting the dear sister. He was an altogether changed man. He would come out with strong arguments against his ancestors' faith ! He never knew that each word of the learned scholar was piercing cruelly a soft bleeding heart. Appar was now a known scholar established in the royal court and had fame all over the land, but the loving sister did not want it. She wanted it in some other form. She knew she would win him over one day. Bookish learning had generated unusual ego in the heart of Appar. He was proud of his power of reasoning. Devotion does not need reasoning. Divine revelation is much beyond reasoning and scholarly duals.

Appar could not anticipate it. He wanted to be a great scholar. He became one. He joined Jainism no doubt, but there was no harm in it. Any person could change his faith. He got upset at the sister's disturbed mind.

The saintly sister would not hesitate even to rebuke the brother for his growing ego which was deterrant to God-realisation. She wanted the young scholarly brother to have a high status in the spiritual realm. For that he must have inner light. Inner light would never generate within as long as ego and pride persist. The family, known for high spiritual attainment was, according to her, getting dwindled at his hand. The biographer scholar gives a vivid picture of the sister's agony. "She felt as if her heart would break, for, she now a recluse engaged day and night in performing minor services at the *Shiva* temple at Tirumvathigai Veerattanam. She spent her time in constant prayer to *Shiva* for bringing him back to her.

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Her prayers were answered at last." It is absolutely true to observe, "The ways of God are mysterious. He sent to Appar a disease of the body to cure the disease of his soul."

Appar had a severe colic pain. He was simply dying of that. "Remedies, both medicinal and occult, were tried at the monastery, but they were of no avail. Appar suffered excruciating pain, and felt that he might die, and he would have welcomed death if it came to relieve him. He desired to see his sister and sent word to her. Much as she loved her brother, she could not brook the idea of going into the Jain monastery, even to see him."

The story is fascinating. It indicates the supernatural touches of the divinity.

The story says, Appar could realise that the orthodox *Shaiva* sister was hesitating to enter the monastery. So "one night he decided to meet her, unobserved, outside the monastery. He was writhing in pain when he came to his sister and fell at her feet."

She was overwhelmed with sorrow but consoled the brother. It was quite possible that the sister too had power of miracle. "She smeared his body with holy ashes, uttered the name of *Shiva* in his ears and took him to the *Shiva* temple before dawn, as he went round the precincts and entered the shrine he felt a new inspiration and sang ecstatically of the glory of the Lord."

"He prayed for forgiveness of the sins committed by him and expressed his gratitude for having been relieved of his affliction. When he finished the prayer, the pain had disappeared and he felt that the Lord was pleased with him. He heard a voice from the shrine calling him by the appreciative appellation of Tirunavukkarasu or Lord of speech. He dedicated his new power to the singing of the glory of God and vowed to use his hands only in His service and to keep His temples clean."

This happens to a person who meditates for ages. It is not easy to discover a real devotee. The person whom outwardly we may think an athiest may be inwardly a great believer. Who could know the agony of Appar? May be outwardly he was defying *Shiva* and inwardly was meditating on Him. This happens in a real Saint's career. Only a true devotee has right to protest against the deity when justice, in

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the wordly sense, is denied to him. It is difficult to discriminate just and unjust on the mere face of it. May be the whole thing was pre-destined. Otherwise, why should God deprieve him of all worldly peace at such a young age? It was possibly to provoke him. When provoked, the man comes out in his real self.

Appar heard a divine voice asking him to go ahead with his new divine consciousness among all around. Appar fainted before the *Shivalinga*. After a long time he sang of the glory of the beloved Lord *Shiva*.

The saint had a trance in which he heard a divine voice. "I am happy with your hymns. People would know you only as the Master of speeches from today. You will be the new spiritual path-finder of the *Shaivas*."

In trance itself Acharya Appar prayed, "O Lord, if you are really happy with my prayers, kindly grant me the boon that I might be your worthy servant. Let my meditation be fixed only on you." The flood of light disappeared. Outside the door the most affectionate sister was waiting patiently for him. She was in tears. She did not want anything else. Her life's ambition succeeded to her entire satisfaction. She did not wait for a moment. She took the brother to her own Guru who initiated Appar to *Shiva mantra*. With the new life Appar started deep meditation on the *Shaiva* temple. He studied in depth the works of the Shaivacharya Manikkavachaka.

Manikkavachaka was a legendary figure. Not only his *stotramalas*, his very dedicated life itself was a message of divine love to all. Appar dipped deeply in the *Shaiva* philosophy of the ideal saint.

Manikkavachaka's life sketch reads like a thrilling story. The enlightened scholar who was shifted by the Pandyaraj to the royal court as Prime Minister, nevertheless had no peace of mind. He was longing for a real spiritual path-finder.

Once the king called Manikkavachaka, told him in confidence he was apprehanding danger from the neighbouring king. So he asked him to get best varieties of good horses and build up a strong cavalry. He handed him over a big amount on that account and advised him to proceed to Tirupperundurai immediately. Tirupperundurai was a holy spot sanctified by *Shiva*

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and Manikkavachaka found there a great *Shaiva guru* who had been blessed with inner enlightenment. He fell at his feet and got initiation. The preceptor asked him to do two things and vanished from Tirupperundurai. He asked the new disciple to erect a *Shiva* temple on the most suitable spot at Tirupperundurai to bring together all the *Shiva* devotees. He wanted him to make it the centre of their divine activities. Secondly, the *Guru* directed him to compose hymns in praise of *Shiva* to inspire one and all. The devoted disciple spent all the money given by the king to build up a cavalry. He forgot his assignment and returned to the royal court without buying any horse. He narrated the whole story to the royal authority. King Mahendra had already received the information through his own men. When he saw the Prime Minister he simply pounced on him in fury. The Minister had no business to defy the royal order. He had no authority to spend money of the royal exchequer. Without further discussion he sent him to jail. Manikkavachaka spent some time in the jail. Then the trial started. During the trial the saint pleaded guilty. Because of his honest handling of the royal administration, his scholarly attainment and *Shiva bhakti*, which were proverbial, the king did not give him the normal capital punishment. The king found out the details through his spies and got confirmed that not a furthing was spent in personal enjoyment. So he treated him leniently. He confiscated all his properties and released him from the jail.

To the saint it was a boon in disguise. He thanked the king for giving him such a rare opportunity to devote himself to divine thoughts. Now he had no other worldly ties to hold him behind. He devoted himself to composing hymns in praise of *Shiva*. The saint, after a fruitful and more meaningful career than a prime minister, got merged in the idol of *Nataraj* at Chidambaram temple.

Acharya Appar made Manikkavachaka the idol and ideal of his life. He tried to imbibe the spirit of devotion, renunciation and single-minded loyalty to *Shiva* as preached and practised by Manikkavachaka.

Manikkavahaka's hymns gave the saint new inspiration. It gave him fresh vigour and strength. They opened a new window of vision on spiritual life of Appar. His simple way of living, his loving disposition, his brialliant talks and most

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striking hymns made him extremely popular among masses of Kanchi, Madura, Chidambaram which were agog with his name. The court attendants got alarmed. They felt terribly jealous. They were quite happy with him when he shifted to their faith. They expected him to give them a new spiritual lead in Jainism. Now that he not only deserted them but was spreading an altogether different faith, which was not the royal religion, made them active to stand united to harrass him.

The Jain scholars of the court made strong representations to the king to give him exemplary punishment for defying the royal faith to which he himself was wedded and for which he was trained by scholars at state expense.

The king got enraged and ordered him to be produced in the court. That was done.

Appar was produced in the royal court. The saint made it clear that he had freedom of faith and was definitely not bound by any authority to follow only the royal faith. As a seeker of truth he studied *Vedic*, Buddhist and Jain philosophies and literature and finally was impressed by the *Shaiva* philosophy.

The enraged king gave him capital punishment.

The king's men who were more enthusiastic to harm him took him on the peak of a hill and threw him down. Appar came out unhurt. His body got stuck up on a tree branch.

The king ordered the servants to tie the Saint to a stone and throw him into the sea. That was done. The legend goes that the stone turned into timber and the floating saint was rescued by some fishermen. That was at Cuddalore Port which has become a holy pilgrimage since then.

The King was stern. He wanted to teach the rebel a lesson. "He was imprisoned and we are told that he was put in a lime-kiln to be burnt alive. The flames of the kiln did no harm to him and he came out unscathed, to the despair of his enemies. Protected by the grace of God, he said that even in the kiln he felt as if he was enjoying an evening moon and the fanning southern breeze of the spring season."

The next plan hatched was to poison him. "But what

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could poison do to a devotee of *Shiva*, who had willingly drunk the poison of *Halahala* to save the world?"

Then "an angry elephant was set against him, but miraculously, on approaching him, it paid obeisance to him as to a beloved master and went round him."

King Mahendra Varma was stunned. He himself was a connoisseur of learning and seeker of truth. He realised the sainthood of Appar. "The Pallava ruler, Mahendra Varma, came there seeking the saint and full of repentance, fell at his feet and asked for pardon. The saint blessed the king. Mahendra Varma gave up Jainism and became a follower of the *Shaiva* faith. This turned the tide against Jainism in this part of the country."

The king offered him the royal *Guru's* high position in the court but he humbly declined. He was leading a simple life of a servant of *Shiva*. "He went from temple to temple singing hymns in praise of *Shiva* and cleansing the holy environs with the hope that he always carried with him as a symbol of service."

The king's initiation to *Shaivism* made it easy for the devotees to spread the message of the Master in an entirely different magnitude. The whole of Tamilnad became agog with the new spiritual message of renunciation of *Shaivism*. Madura, Kanchi, Chidambaram became more active. The *Shiva* temples started to attract big gatherings. Scholars freely started composing thousands of devotional hymns. The *Shaiva* Acharyas got greater importance than ever before.

The devotees got specially attracted by the humility of Acharya Appar. They all joined him in cleansing the surroundings of *Shiva* temples throughout the land. It was an altogether new movement. They all drew great inspiration from the ideal virtues of the Saint. To Appar, the harbinger of a new life in whole of Tamil Nad, as described by another Saint scholar, "chastity, poverty and self-surrender are the essential virtues of spiritual life. By chastity is meant an extreme and limpid purity of soul, virgin to all but God. By poverty is meant an utter stripping of the self, the casting off of immaterial as well as material wealth, a complete detachment from all finite things. By self-surrender is meant that abnegation of selfhood, that mortification of will which results in complete humility and

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holy in difference to the accidents of life and absolute reliance on God."

There was a new flood of devotion in the whole of Tamil Nad. The Saint rehabilitated the *Shivalingam* idols in all the temples demolished or destroyed by earlier royal wrath. He made extensive tours of all these spots and saw personally the idols installed. He conducted the prayers in all these temples himself. It is recorded in the *Cultural Heritage of India*, how a group of unwise persons wanted to spread ill of the saint and how they sent some beautiful call-girls to his camp. They were dazzled by his spiritual power. They simply fell at his feet and begged pardon. When the conspirators heard the story they too repented and asked for the Saint's mercy.

Acharya Appar's hymns to *Shiva* are household treasures in the South. The most fascinating songs are grouped together in his immortal master piece *Tebaram* which are expressions of his inner realisations.

In a hymn to Lord *Shiva*, Acharya Appar sings :

My Lord has worn a garland
of thousands of millions of universes !
The wave of creation and destruction
has been handled somctime as the
symbol of welfare sometime of dooms day
As *Shiva* and also as *Rudra*.
How to hold the limitless infinite
In the tiny human heart?
How to get rid of death and destruction
and get salvation?
We are all unwise. That's why we
have built up a wall of ego and
got ourselves separated from the
bright glow of the three-eyed one,
The symbol of *Satyam*, *Shivam* and *Sundaram*.
Demoslish the wall of ego.
Surrender yourself meekly, humbly,
as His servant, dedicate yourself completely with
full faith and
Take His shelter.

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Only then will the Lord
Shower His limitless mercy,
(Only this) The heavenly nectar, symbol of progress,
will touch you at every
stage in life.

This immortal hymn is only one of three hundred in *Tebaram*.

Acharya Appar passed away in 680 AD at the ripe age of eighty. It is recorded that the saint, while singing a self-composed hymn on *Shiva*, prayed to the Lord that since his worldly assignment had been over he might be recalled to *Shivadham*. It is said a flood of light appeared before the holy Acharya and took away the sacred soul. The elder sister Tilakavatiyar's soul must have had rested in peace. It was she who had built up the loving saint-brother bit by bit, stage by stage and guided him at every step and finally led him to immortality!

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SANKARA—THE UNIVERSAL ACHARYA

(781 AD - 820 AD)

The most dynamic among the Saints of India, Bhagwan Sankara, during his short life of only thirty two years left a permanent imprint on philosophy and culture not only of India but the world. As so aptly described by Sister Nivedita, "at this moment the whole of the national genius awoke once more in Sankaracharya". The Saint revived the entire *Sanatan* philosophy, almost forgotten due to long negligence. As Paul Deussen observed, "The system of the *Vedanta* as founded on the *Upanishads* and *Vedanta Sutras* and accomplished by Sankara's commentaries on them—equal in rank to Plato and Kant—is one of the most valuable products of the genius of mankind in his researches of the eternal truth."

Sankara follows *Sruti* which says *tat tvam asi*, thou art that. One must get himself identical with the absolute *Brahman*. Sankara asks us to renounce everything if we are interested in God-realisation. No compromise with partial adjustment. Everything else is an illussion-*maya*. Only God exists. The world is *mithya*—an artificial abode.

Bhagwan Sankaracharya is "undoubtedly the most widely known of India's saintly philosophers, both within the country and outside."

The essence of the Saint's preaching and teaching had been the non-dual *Brahman's* existence. Sankaracharya says, "*Ekamevadvayam Brahman neha nanasti Kinchana*"

The one non-dual *Brahman* alone exists : there is no duality at all.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "Sankaracharya worked out, rationalised and placed before men the wonderful coherent system of *Advaita*. According to Sankara, God is both the material and the efficient cause through *Maya* but not in reality. God has not become the universe, but the universe

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is not, and God is. Unity, the one *Brahman*, is the ultimate, the goal."

The universe is nothing but an illusion, he knows.

And yet Sankara was a man of amazing energy and vast activity. He was no escapist. Born in Malabar in the far south of India he travelled incessantly all over India, meeting innumerable people, arguing, debating, reasoning, convincing and filling them with a part of his passion and tremendous vitality. One gets really puzzled when one recounts how in a brief life of thirty-two years Sankaracharya did the work of many long lives and left such an impress of his powerful mind and rich personality on India that it is very evident even today.

Kaippalli Illam Vidyadhiraja of Kaladi village was quite worried for the last few days. His son Shivaguru who has just completed his education would not simply settle down. He has no inclination to marry. He wants to renounce everything and leave the world in search of Truth and the divine light. Vidyadhiraja took a very wise step. He suggested to the son to do the same as a divine couple. He finally got him married to an equally religious girl Aryamba, daughter of Maghapandita. The ideal couple led a pious life. A number of years passed but they had no child. Near Kaladi, there was the temple of *Shiva* at Shivakshetra in Trichur. Both decided to offer their prayers or *bhajanam*. Just like at the Shiva temple at Tarakers war in Bengal, at Shivakshetra in Kerala, the devotee has to stay for days or sometimes months, till the voice of the Lord is revealed and heard. There is a holy pond where pilgrims have to take bath before prayer. The vow is repeated before the Lord. It is on Vrishachala or the sacred Bull Hill commonly known as *Tiru Siva Perur*, the holy place of *Shiva*. or *Shivakshetra*.

Shivaguru was indeed *guru* of the living *Shiva*. Sankara was a versatile genius. Before he learnt his mother tongue, which was Malayalam, he picked up Sanskrit when he was just one. At two he picked up his mother tongue. Himself a learned man Shivaguru would teach the son himself. The most remarkable thing about the prodigy was that whenever he heard a thing he could repeat the same *ad verbatim*. According to the original Sanskrit biography, detailed description says, "Sankara became acquainted with Prakrita, Magadhi, and Samskrita languages in

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his infancy". According to the *Madhaviya Sankara-vijaya*, "in his first year he learned the Sanskrit alphabet and his own language at two, he acquired the ability to read at three; he studied the *Kavyas* and *Puranas* and intuitively understood many parts of them. Before the *upanayana* (investiture with the sacred thread) could be performed, Sivaguru passed away. Aryamba had to be consoled by her son. It was for his sake that she had henceforth to live. The *upanayana* was performed when Sankara was five years old. He was sent to a *guru-kula* for *Vedic* studies. He mastered the *Vedic* lore with the six auxiliaries, as well as the other *sastras* in a very short time. He lived, accordin g to rule, as a *brahmacharin* subsisting on alms and rendering service to the preceptor."

This versatility is something unique in world history of civilisation. John Stuart Mill is said to have been the youngest scholar in the world. His father would teach him himself even while going for a stroll. He started at three and it is said was a world renowned authority at thirteen. Sankara started at one completed everything while only eight ! There is no parallel of a prodigy in the whole world. Mahaprabhu Chaitanya was a great scholar but that was when he was fourteen. It is not proper to compare these divine souls. It is yet a mystery how such a minor child could acquire this vast learning so quickly. Even just to listen to all these scriptures physically one would take much time.

The same biographer says again, "He became well-versed in *tarka* (logic) : he acquired expert knowledge in *Sankhya* lore; he gained wonderful mastery of *Patanjala Yoga*: he learned the intricate doctrine of *Bhatta Mimamsa*; the happiness resulting from the knowledge of these disciplines, it must be said, was included in the bliss of *Advaita-vidya*; can the beneflt accruing from a well exceed the benefit that the ocean yields ?" Learning adorns those who cultivate it; but in the case of Sankara, it was learning that was adorned by him.

Eminent scholars at the Sanskrit College, known as *Chatuspathis* were struck with wonder at the versatility of the young one. He was hardly five then, he was listening to the discussion of his senior colleagues. They hardly knew that the child was devouring each word of their discussion. Sankara was silently listening to them. Suddenly he came out with his origin-

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al comment and gave his point of view. Sankara, so long only had been listening to them. How long could he keep quiet when he knew it so thoroughly ? The senior students were stupefied. The teacher was stunned. Sankara explained that he had been listening only to his teacher imparting lessons to his senior colleagues. And that he only connected all the earlier lessons which he remembered thoroughly. Out of all these lectures he culled he only came out with a conclusion which he added. That was his interpretation of the whole thing. Who in the world would believe the versatility of a child scholar ? There are historical descriptions of the details of these incidents by contemporary scholars.

At seven, two years after the sacred thread ceremony of the child, when Sankara returned from the *Guru Kula* the residential college for higher learning he had nothing left to learn. His mother was simply struggling for mere existence. It was with great difficulty that she could run the house. Now she thought perhaps the poverty would be won over. The child started a college of his own. But who would come to get his lessons from a child who has hardly crossed seven summers ? It was quite difficult for him even to get some students. But gradually the fame of learning of the young scholar spread far and wide. Students started flocking the little hut at Kaladi from long distances. One day a strange event took place. It was strange perhaps because nobody in the family—consisting of only the little son and the widowed mother could even anticipate it. Certainly it was all pre-destined.

Quite a number of scholars who were passing through Kaladi came to visit the young scholar. They had heard about him and thought of paying a visit to his college on their way.

They were well looked after. Sankara himself tried his very best to make them comfortable. They were well fed. They were charmed by the learning of the child. They had long discussions on different aspects of logic and grammer. They discussed the four *Vedas* and finally the intricate problems of *Vedanta*.

They were simply impressed by Sankara's versatility. They could not believe that any human being could ever have so deep learning at that early age. The child must be a divine soul in disguises. They were eager to see the horoscope of the young

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scholar. Mother Aryamba promptly produced the horoscope. The scholars examined it thoroughly. They were all surprised and equally delighted. In one voice they said Sankara was not an ordinary child. He was going to be the Master of the religious world. He was an incarnation of *Shiva*. But suddenly the holy men stopped.

The Mother's curiosity increased. "Yes, why did you stop ? I am sure, there is no danger to the child's life", said the mother with a chocked voice.

But the sages would not speak out. The mother apprehended danger for the child's future days.

"You are a very lucky mother. Your son is none but Lord *Shiva* himself. His learning is unparalleled. *Saraswati* resides on his tongue. He will revitalise Hindu religion. But his total span of life is only upto eight.

The Mother was not interested in the son's activities to revitalise the Hindu religion. She was not interested in the child's becoming a divine personality. What will she do with that ? She wants only one thing—a long life for him.

"You said only eight ?"

She whispered,

"Yes, it is eight but if he has to do all these religious reforms perhaps the life may be extended by another eight years. At no rate, as the calculation says, will he survive beyond sixteen."

The mother heard everything.

The child heard the details with rapt attention. He has to finalise his programme. Then and there he took the decision to renounce the world.

The sages left with both pleasure and pain; pleasure because they had the company of a divine child ; pain because they were certain that the divine one will not live long.

The mother and the child took the forecasts seriously.

Miracles sometimes happen only suddenly and go down in history as events. They are confirmed by eye witnesses. Chronicles carry them to the next generations. They become

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part of history. That day such a miracle happened in a remote village Kaladi in South India. This little village is sanctified by the river Churna. A little boy of hardly eight did this miracle. The child's mother had gone for a holy dip in the river. It was quite some time that she had gone but she was not returning. The lady would not take any food without offering her prayers. She would not offer her prayers without a sacred river bath. She has been doing this for quite some time. But she was never so late before.

The child got worried. There is no third person in the little hut, so he went to search the beloved mother. He just lost his father. He cannot afford to lose the mother so suddenly now the child followed the daily regular route. Who lies there on the street ? Yes, it is a human body. It is a very known face. Aryamba was lying there completely unconscious, pale and weak as she was. She took time to recover. She was delighted to see the affectionate child taking care of her. With great difficulty, leaning on the shoulder of the young one she returned home.

Something has to be done. The mother cannot offer her prayers without a holy bath. She is too weak to reach the river every day. So the child decided to change the course of the river ! Long long ago he did it much earlier. He brought *Bhagirathi* in ancient time. Now he was only a child of eight. He cannot allow the mother to faint on the street again. The river has to flow near his hut. Mother must have a bath daily without covering any distance. The child prayed. Did he pray to himself ? Who knows ? The river listened to him. It changed its course. Not one or two spectators, the whole village flocked to greet the new Bhagirath or *Shiva* who repeated his performance once more. Churna flowed quietly near his house. Who else can be the new child but Sankara, an incarnation of Lord *Shiva* ?

There is another interesting story about the miraculous power of child Sankara. It was just after his sacred thread ceremony. During those days it was the custom with *Brahmacharis* to collect alms from door to door. One day Sankara went to a poor Nambudiri house and said *bhabati bhikshang dehi.* Oh mother give me alms.

The child was indeed very attractive. He was just initiated

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to *gayatri*, so an object of reverence. The Brahmin himself had gone to collect alms. Only his wife was left at home. There was nothing for her to offer. Yet she had no desire to return the boy empty handed. Only a few *amalaki* fruits were there. The fruit, *Myrobalan* in English is a sacred one and is one of three most useful medicinal fruits. The lady offered the fruit to the child Saint with great devotion and sincerity. The child accepted it gracefully. He was overwhelmed with emotion. He wanted to remove her poverty. So he sang to the glory of the Goddess of wealth. There was suddenly a shower of gold *amalakis* and on his return from collection of alms the Brahmin was simply stunned at his sudden change of fortune.

The Brahmin house called *Swarnath Mana* in South Kaladi continues to be afluent till today.

Sankara knew who he was. He knew what was his purpose in this world. He was convinced that the worldly things were not meant for him. He already showed signs of great renunciation.

The King of Kerala, Raja Chandra Shekhar was a patron of learning. He heard about the versatility of the young prodigy. He was keen to see him. He also heard about the divine power of miracle of the child, which had spread far and wide. The news about Sankara's blessings to turn the *amalaki* fruits into gold had also spread from mouth to mouth. He ordered his ministers to call Sankara to his royal court. He wanted to have some discussion with him. He planned to honour the learned child.

The royal servants came to invite Sankara to the court accordingly. There was a big crowd. Sankara showed his surprise. A child faced the royal advisers so promptly and courageously that all those present were stunned. He refused to go to the court even if it were to shower honour to him. He insisted that being a poor *Brahmin* scholar he had no fancy for any such royal blessings and honour. In this transitory world, he emphasised, this outward show of pomp and power was simply redundant.

The royal servants were worried. They knew if they failed to convince a young child of hardly seven to meet the king they might be admonished by the king.

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So they became desperate and begged him to accompany them to the king.

Sankara's reply was firm and bold. He insisted that knowledge was not to be exhibited. It was not a matter like ordinary commodity in the market that it could be sold or purchased by a king knowledge had to be acquired, realised and spread throughe *prabachana.* So, declined to oblige them.

The royal adviser returned to the court. The king who was waiting eagerly for the young child got disappointed. But his respect for the scholar increased ten-fold. His curiosity to have a look at the child and test his knowledge became all the more keener and deeper. So one day, with his advisers and guards Raja Chandra Shekhar reached the hut of Sankaracharya at Kaladi.

The king was overwhelmed with the expressions, the charm, the personality and above all the depth of the child's learning. How could a child be an all-knowing, perfect pandit ? He must not be an ordinary soul. He must have appeared in his kingdom as a messenger of God. He touched the feet of the child and offered thousands of gold coins.

The child was happy at the devotion of the king. He too appreciated the king's regard for learning. But what will he do with the gold coins ?

Yes he can. He accepted the king's gifts, but did not touch them. He asked the numerous village folk who had presented themselves at the door of the hut to distribute all the gold coins to the poor in the whole village. He had no attachment for money. He had no fascination for honour or fame. He wanted only one thing. That was to renounce the world, realise truth and reveal the nectar of divine knowledge to all who needed it so badly.

The mother would not allow the child to renounce the world. How can she? She has none in the world. How will she live all alone? And how will the little one pass his days at this tender age? The child was hardly eight year old!

Yes, you do not care for me. If I leave you your blessings and God's light will lead my way. All the people of Kaladi and neighbouring places will feed me. And for yourself do not worry. I shall make a gift of my property to the relations who

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will feed you and look after you. I shall see to that before I leave you.

But the mother's mind did not respond to the appeals.

Sankara was counting days. He knew every day passing meant a day lost. He had great work. The whole country was looking forward for his spiritual guidance. He must prepare himself thoroughly for that great task.

The mother would not sleep. She was worried about the life of the child. Ever since the sages told her about the short span of life of Sankara she had forgotten sleep. So too Sankara. But Sankara longed to get light. He must prepare himself thoroughly for that great task.

He must renounce the world. He was hearing the call of his spiritual preceptor. He knew the guide was simply waiting for his arrival.

The main purpose of a son is to conduct the last rites of the parents. The mother did not like to die unsung, unwept and uncared for. Why should she? She has a child god as her son. She repeated this argument.

Sankara came out with a prompt reply. "Yes. I promise I shall certainly do your last rite". *Agni sanskar* is the last rite to the Hindus. The funeral pyre is lit by the son.

Sankara said, "It does not matter that your existing custom does not allow a monk to conduct the *agni sanskar*, the funeral pyre is not lit by one who has renounced everything." After renouncing the world the monk is not even allowed to visit his relations.

Sankara promised that he would come from whichever part of the country he be, at whatever condition it may, to conduct the last rite and look after the mother.

Aryamba knew that her son would follow every word of his promise. And yet could not give permission to Sankara to renounce the world. A mother's heart would never agree to the proposal. The mirage of *maya* would appear, so strongly before the mother of the divine soul that even she, knowing fully well what her son was, could not permit that day her son to turn a monk. *Sannyas* is not possible for Sankara without mother's permission. He must have the blessings of his dear pious mother in this new journey. He must convince her how it is difficult and suffocating for him to live at home.

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Sankara must win her over.

He started propitiating her. He offered prayers to the Almighty to reveal to the Mother. It was a tussle of wits between the mother and the son.

Only the previous day Aryamba was thinking of getting Sankara married at the early age. That would perhaps solve the problem. The son's reply simply surprised her. The child told his mother about his divine mission.

The mother remembered the dream at Shivakshetra after the *Bhajanam*.

That day a strange thing happened. It was simply like a miracle. Both the mother and the son had gone for a bath in the river Churna. It was now just in front of their house.

Sankara had just gone down to have a dip there. Suddenly a crocodile caught hold of his leg and started dragging him further and further away.

Aryamba was crying for help. She did not know what to do. She almost fainted in helplessness.

Sankara thought his days were numbered. He was just going to be devoured by the crocodile. Before his death he wanted to fulfil his life's desire.

So he said loudly. "Mother I am now going to die. There is no escape from crocodile. At least for the parting moment kindly permit me to take to *sannyas*, so that I may die like a monk."

The mother became helpless. She had no other alteranative. And besides that none is even trying to save the son. Aryamba agreed to her son's *sannyas*. She permitted Sankara to turn a monk before his imminent death at the jaw of the crocodile.

Then came a miracle. Suddenly a couple of fishermen appeareed on the spot. They killed the crocodile and saved Sankaracharya. It was something really unbelievable.

Now what to do?

Mother has already given consent to Sankara's monkhood. Sankara himself took *sannyas* in his heart of heart. He cannot return home.

The mother had a mixed feeling.

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She was exceedingly happy now that Sankara was saved by providence. She was equally sad that she will have to be separated from the dear child for good.

She asked the son to accompany her. Sankara may not enter the house any more but he can certainly stay near it under some tree. So he accompanied the mother upto the shadow of the big tree near their house.

The child conducted his own *Shraddha* ceremony. He conducted *Biraja home*. With tears in her eyes the mother had to bless the son and part with him for good.

Sankara left home when he was below eight. He made all arrangements for his mother's maintenance by offering his share of land and little property to the relatives. He promised to the mother to return to her and conduct her last rites. He started for a much longer journey. He had yet to discover his *guru*, the spiritual guide.

Sankara left Kaladi when he was badly in search of a spiritual preceptor. He had no definite information about the whereabouts of the *guru*. He covered a long distance on foot through the jungles, banks of the river and many towns and villages. It was indeed a very hazardous long journey. He reached the bank of the holi river Narmada. There he heard the name of Govinda Bhagavatapada who was a very learned spiritual saint, a direct disciple of Gaudapada who belonged to the order of the Saint Sukhdeva. Sankara reached him but did not know how to approach the great Master. Govindapada would spend all his time in deep concentration. He would meditate for months together without any food. He would not even break his silence and meet anybody. Nobody would dare disturb him and break his *samadhi*. Perhaps the meeting of Sankara with Govindapada was pre-determined, and the child with great hestitation and embarrassment was standing before the Mahayogin. Suddenly the Mahayogin opened his eyes. He found before him a young bright face. He immediately asked him who he was. Sankara replied to him in ten verses composed on the spot signifying the meaning of self. This is a very important composition by the young Saint popularly known as *Dasasloki*.

The *guru* was extremely happy with the masterly analysis of the young *yogi*. It was a brilliant original interpretation of

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advaita by the young monk. He was delighted to receive him and could immediately identify him as an incarnation of *Shiva* who had appeared on this earth to preach the wisdom of *Vedanta* which was almost getting neglected and was disappearing from the country.

So finally Sankara was initiated into monkhood or *sannyas* by Govindapada, the illustrious disciple of Gaudapada.

In this cave a very interesting miracle happened. One day the river Narmada was in fury and everybody thought that the cave would be flooded by the over-flowing water. But Sankara had put an earthen jar at the door of the cave and through his yogic power he put the entire excess water into that jar. This had confirmed the *Guru* that Sankara was none than *Shiva* himself.

Govinda Bhagavatpada was known as Chandra Sarma before he embraced monkhood. He hailed from Kashmir. He wanted to learn in depth grammar from Maharshi Patanjali who was staying at Chidambaram. On his way he met Gaudapada who was a friend of Patanjali. He told him that Patanjali was not at Chidambaram. He started teaching him grammar himself. Chandra Sarma left for Ujjain. There he spent a few years of married life and left for Badrinath where he met Gauda Bhaktipada again. This time he got initiated by the learned monk who gave a new name Govinda Yogindra or Govinda Bhagavatpada. Govindapada left for the ancient cave on the bank of Narmada where he spent a long time in deep concentration.

After initiatian and proper training in *Vedanta*, Govindapada directed Sankara to go to Varanasi to preach *Advaitavada*.

It was at Varanasi that some disciples started coming around him. The first among them was Sanandana.

At Varanasi Sankara started preaching *Advaita Vedanta* in right earnest. It is said the city was almost forlorn and turned almost in a jungle. He used to take his classes on the bank of the holy Ganga. Hundreds of persons thronged to listen to the versatile child. He was explaining about the uselessness of worldly things. He totally discarded presence of power of devotion —*Shakti*.

When Sankara reached the bank of Ganga along with his disciples he found his way blocked by a dead body. A young

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widow was guarding it. His disciples requested the lady to keep the body aside so that the monk could make his way through.

She kept quiet. Did not care to make notice of their request.

Sankara himself requested her to put the body little aside the main road.

This time the lady looked at the monk and said "Why do you not ask him to move"?

Sankara thought because of sudden grief the lady must have lost her balance of mind.

The lady said, "Look here you have been talking of *Advaita*. You have been talking of only the *Parama Purusa*. This body cannot function without power. And that is *Shakti*. That is why side by side with *Parama Purusa* you must accept the *Parama Prakriti*." So saying suddenly the lady vanished.

Sankara could realise it was Mother Annapurna who came in person to teach him this great lesson.

Another day Sankara was going to have a holy bath at Ganga. He met a *Chandala*, a person of very low birth on way. The man was heavily drunk. He was having four dogs with him. He would not make way for the monk.

Sankara did not like to touch the man and his dogs. So he requested the *Chandala* to give him way.

The man was arrogant. He would not oblige the monk. On the contrary he started telling him, "Who will touch whom? There is only one and only one Being. Why are you getting scared of my touch? The soul never touches anything. And similarly none can touch the soul." The Saint was surprised at the high spiritual utterings of the person. He was sorry for his own contradictions—preaching one thing and practising another.

He could realise that the Chandala was not an ordinary person. He touched his feet. Suddenly Viswanath appeared before him. He came to teach Sankara the essence of the highest thoughts of equality and castelessness of society.

Sankara was exceedingly happy. He had been realising the presence of Viswanath in every step.

Among all the disciples of Sankara, the first and most learned and dedicated was Sanandana. Sanandana would not leave his *guru* alone even for a little while. He not only had

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earned the blessings of Sankara the maximum, he was lucky enough to get direct guidance on all the works of the Master. So to say that on Sankara's philosophy he was the greatest authority. His loyalty to Sankara was proverbial. When Sanandana was so much attached to Sankara, it was quite natural, the Master was also very happy with him. He would not do anything without consulting him. He was in short, very much fond of him.

Now this made his other colleagues jealous of him. Spiritually he was much higher than many of them. And he would not care for any other thing—worldly or circumstantial.

Sankara knew this. He wanted to explain to his disciples about the spiritual superiority of Sanandana. He wanted to prove that he was definitely much superior to them all and deserved more attention of the Master.

These other disciples forgot that above anything else Sanandana was also the first disciples of Sankara. When Sankara came to Varanasi for the first time he found a young man Vishnu Sharma who was waiting to receive him. Vishnu Sharma was spiritually advanced. He was a worshipper of *Nrisimha Avatara*. He had his vision. The *Avatara* had assured him that whenever he would remember him he would appear before him. He did later on when remembered. This was when the young man remembered *Nrisimha Avatara* to save Sankara from the clutch of some *tantrik* dacoit much later.

Vishnu Sharma was not satisfied simply by the vision of the Lord. He meditated further to get his idol in his heart. It was a long drawn process of waiting and *titiksha*. But he won. He won the heart of Sankara by his great devotion. And on his arrival at Varanasi Sankara accepted Vishnu Sharma as his first disciple. Vishnu Sharma had come to Varanasi all the way from the South, *Chola Desa*. Sankara gave him a new name—Sanandana.

Sanandana's *Guru bhakti* was unparalleled.

Sankaracharya wanted to demonstrate this loyal disciple's undying faith in his Master. The whole party was on the bank of Alakananda at Rishikesh. Sanandana had just crossed it by indigenous bridge a little away from their hut to the other side of the Ganga. It is perhaps here that Ganga is the most fierceful. The current is terrific. Question of any body's swimming

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across it does not arise. Sanandana had gone there to collect some medicinal plant.

Suddenly Bhagwan Sankara said, "Where is Sanandana? Call him". Everybody immediately started calling Sanandana. Sankara too came out and he too joined them. Sanandana was ready to return by the indigenous hay bridge spread over boats a little away from the spot. But when he heard the voice of his *guru* he totally forgot about that. He started crossing the strong currents just completely forgetting the consequences. It is recorded by his contemporaries and chroniclers and historians that "at each step he placed on the water a lotus rose to support him." That is why Sanandana, previously as known Vishnu Sharma, became popular as *Padmapada*, the lotus footed.

Sanandana reached his *guru* straight crossing the current by his strong will power. His disciples could understand that the whole incident was only a reminder to them as a warning against their jealousy for a colleague who deserved special attention of their *guru* for his loyalty, learning and deepest devotion. Later on when the Master set up the four important *Maths* at four corners of the country, Sanandana was assigned *Govardana Math* at Puri. He was in-charge of this centre. He became head of a new sect of monks known, among the *Dashnamis* as *aranya* or *bana*. They worship Lord Jagannath as their idol. The monks of this sect follow *Rig Veda*. The most popular pilgrimage with this brotherhood is Mahodadhi.

When the Acharya was busy at Sringeri Math, his illustrious learned disciple Padmapada wanted permission to go on a pilgrimage. He wanted to combine it with discourses with learned scholars with whom he wanted to have debates on *Advaitabad*. In the beginning the Acharya did not like to give his consent. But when he found that Padmapada was really eager to go on visiting some of the holy places he did not stop him. So Padmapada bade good-bye to the Saint and left for all India tour.

The disciples could not guess why the *Guru* wanted to stop him. Normally he never disagreed with any of them on such points.

Padmapada first went round all the holy places of north India. Then he came to South India. He saw a number of holy places. He decided then to visit Rameswaram. On his way

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to Rameswaram he wanted to visit his maternal uncle at Srirangam. He joined his uncle to take few days' rest with him,. Padmapada discussed religious subjects with his uncle. He carried a few books too with him. He carried also his own treatise on *Advaita Vedanta*. His uncle read the book with great interest. The uncle was a disciple of Prabhakar who belonged to the school of Kumaril Bhatta. He was terribly upset when he found that the nephew had taken an altogether opposite view in his book. He was extremely jealous because the matter had been presented in a very convincing manner. Outwardly the uncle only praised the work.

Padmapada knew nothing about it. He was delighted by the appreciation of the beloved uncle.

The uncle was a victim of narrow sectarian outlook. He wanted to destroy this monumental work at any cost. Padmapada started for Rameswaram. The uncle wanted the nephew to rest at his place on his return journey. Padmapada readily agreed. He decided to meet his *guru* at Sringeri from Srirangam.

The shrewd maternal uncle suggested what was the fun in carrying the books to Rameswaram. He might instead leave them with him, and collect them on his return journey. Padmapada thought it was a good idea. He agreed to the plan and left his few books including his own treatise on *Advaita Vedanta* with his maternal uncle in good faith. The uncle was happy beyond description.

The crooked man tried ways and ways to destroy the manuscript. He could not tolerate the idea of getting these views opposed to his school to be circulated and discussed by learned scholars. But how to destroy it? The nephew must not doubt him. It must be shown as a loss by accident.

The foolish fellow burnt his own house. He set fire to his house himself and started, calling village folk to save him !

In due course Padmapada returned from Rameswaram. He heard everything. He was sad that such an accident took place. The uncle pretended to be sadder because of the loss of the manuscript. Padmapada sprang a surprise. He started consoling his uncle and requested him not to worry about the manuscript. He assured him that it was not at all difficult for him to rewrite the book.

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The uncle was disappointed. Poor man set fire to his own house just to get rid of the treatise on his opposite philosophy. But seeing that his trick did not click he started thinking still of another device. To get rid of the roots of spread of this new faith the uncle decided to kill Padmapada by poisoning. He did it one day. Padmapada did not die but he became extremely weak. He lost memory to such an extent that it was almost impossible for him to rewrite the book.

Padmapada had no words to tell his *guru*. Acharya Sankara had asked him not to go alone on that journey. The Saint was pained at the sad plight of the dear one. He had heard the manuscript once when Padmapada read it out before him. He remembered each word of it.

Padmapada was exceedingly happy. Acharya Sankara gave a dictation and Padmapada could get his entire manuscript back in tact.

There are other incidents showing the extraordinary sharpness of memory of the Master. The King of Kerala had written three plays. To get them reviewed king had read them out before Sankara. After a very long time when the Saint met the King he asked the latter what had happened to the three manuscripts. The King told him sadly that they had got lost. Sankara had remembered each work of them. So the King got his three manuscripts in the process. He got them noted down.

At Srisaila the Acharya met with a terrible confrontation with *Kapaliks*. Quite a number of them took to the doctrines of *Advaita* as preached by Sankara. These *Kapaliks* were very dangerous people. They used to follow the cult of *Tantra* and used to drink wine in human skull. The word *Kapalik* means one who carries a human skull with him. They were extremely powerful. They disgraced the entire religious life of the country. They used to sacrific human being before the goddess. One of the reasons for their supremacy was the occult power, they used to have black magic spells. They were quite in number. Mostly they used to acquire this power to harm others. This spell of black magic was known as *Siddhai*. This is a very inferior form of spiritual power against which all ancient and modern saints have warned their followers.

Ugra Bhairav was a powerful *Kapalik* who, among other

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colleagues occepted Sankara as their *guru*. He used to eat his food from a human skull. He used to drink also from the same. Just as an Indian monk carries a water pot, popularly known as *Kamandalu*, Ugra Bhairav and his other colleagues used to carry with him a human skull.

Ugra Bhairav pretended as a very close disciple of the Master by his personal service and earned his confidence. Sankara thought Ugra Bhairaw was one of his close associates. One day it so happened that the wicked *Kapalik* placed his cards before the Master. He opened his mind shamelessly and pleaded that he wanted to sacrifice Sankara before the goddess to get occult power. He needed the body either of a king or a great *yogi* to fulfil his desire. For a long time he was searching such a body. He knew that by *Brahmajnana* one may get heavenly bliss. But he did not want it. He could not forget about his life's dream to get the occult power of *Siddhai* by offering an all knowing Saint. There could have been no better choice than Sankara, the insolent *Kapalik* insisted. He wanted Sankara to oblige him by allowing him to sacrifice the pure body of the *Mahayogin*.

Sankara was always in a different world. He never cared for himself or his physical body. To that extent he was as simple as a child. He did not oppose the wicked man and readily agreed to Ugra Bhairav's suggestion. He found nothing wrong in the proposal. But the *Kapalik* was a cunning fellow. He wanted the whole thing to be kept as a closely guarded secret. He decided to arrange the religious ritual in a dense jungle where he would take Sankara for sacrifice.

So on a full dark night known as *amabasya*, he arranged the *Puja* of *Bhairava* in a deep jungle. At mid night when all the disciples were fast asleep Ugra Bhairav came and took Sankara with him. Sankara reached the spot. Ugra Bhairav was very happy. His whole life's dream was going to be fulfilled. For Sankara, the body meant nothing. He sat in meditation.

Padmapada was sleeping next to Sankara in their *ashrama* He suddenly saw a dream that a *Kapalik* was going to kill his *guru*. Suddenly he got up and found too that the Saint was missing. All his colleagues too got up. There was a thorough search. But Sankara was not to be found any where nearby. The whole team got terribly upset. They did not know what

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to do, where to go. They really beccme puzzled. Padmapada was a worshipeer of *Nrisimha Deva* before meeting Sankara. *Nrisimha Deva* had promised him too that he would appear before him whenever Padmapada would remember him. So, as the last resort, Padmapada remembered his deity to save his *guru*. Suddenly a miracle took place. Padmapada became fierce. He looked like a giant. He roared like a lion and straight ran to the jungle where the *Kapalik* was on the point of killing his *guru*. Seeing Padmapada in this abnormal state of mind all his fellow brethren too followed him. They too reached the spot. Sankara was in meditation. The *Kapalik* was just raising the sword to kill the Saint. He was terribly frightened by the fierceful appearance of Padmapada, who snatched the sword from Ugra Bhairav and killed him on the spot.

The noise broke Sankara's meditation. Sankara could realise that this was not Padmapada but *Nrisimha* Deva himself. So he started prayers in his glory. Padmapada fainted. He was in that state for quite some time.

Sankara was sad that a *Kapalik* was killed. Padmapada was not at all sad. He was prepared to go to hell if it were necessary to save his Master.

The disciples were spell bound. Sankara was happy with Padmapada's loyalty and devotion for his *guru*, The other disciples witnessed the miraculous power of Padmapada for a second time. The first was when he crossed Alakananda on foot, with each foot step on a lotus.

Sankara had reached sixteen. He was serious about his final return. His work in the world was over. At least the task of interpretation of some of the masterpieces on *Vedanta*, *Vedas*, were definitely completed. He knew it needed further propagation. He also knew that these treatises needed detailed discussions with specialists on the subject. He felt that the matter needed study in depth by the contemporary scholars throughout the country. They needed to be popularised among the masses. But what to do? Time was limited, task was limitless.

One day after taking his class with his disciples on the bank of holy Ganga. Sankara found his students tired. It was noon.

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He was lost in a pensive mood. He was thinking of the basic immediate tasks before his final audie from earth. Suddenly an old *Brahmin* scholar appeared before him. The old *Brahmin* wanted to enter into a religious debate with Sankara. It was unexpected. Sankara had already defeated the important scholars of Varanasi. That was already known to the *elite* of the town. Sankara could not locate this old *Brahmin* scholar but he did not like to brush him aside just like that. He modestly asked him his field of specialisation. The Brahmin wanted to discuss the *Brahma sutra*. Good heavens, That was by and large Sankara's own subject. Does this old man not know about it? If he were a scholar he should be knowing about his treatise. The old Brahmin said. "These people say that you have commented on the *Sutras* of Maharsi Vyas. It you are as learned as that, let me hear you expound any one *sutra* of Vyas.

Modestly Sankara submitted "I do not claim to be the master of the *Sutras*. Still if you question me on them, I shall try to answer to the best of my knowledge".

The Brahmin took it easily.
The disciples were looking eagerly.

Sankara was naturally waiting with surprise and suspense for the question. All the time he was trying to locate the strange scholar. In fact he never heard of such a scholar living in Varanasi who was an authority on Vyasa's *Brahma Sutra*. He asked modestly the old Brahmin scholar to come out with his question.

The whole atmosphere was quite tense.
The Brahmin looked quite confident.

The disciples, Sankara and the old Brahmin all forgot that it was past noon.

The old man said, "All right, *Sannyasin* teacher let us take only the first *sutra* from the third chapter of Brahma-sutra, you remember.

Tadantarapratipattau ramhati
Samparisvaktah prasnanirupanabhyam

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Bhagwan Sankara replied, "In the light of the conversation between Gautama and Jaibali in the *Thandila-sruti* this *sutra* means that at the time of death the *Jiva* departs clothed in the subtle essence of the *Bhutas* or elements.

The old Brahmin, to the astonishment of all scholars present was not prepared to accept the explanation.

Sankara retorted back with deeper and subtler replies.

The discussion started. It continued for next few days.

Padmapada was suspicious. He was made the moderator. In any controversy the judgment given by Padmapada was to be final. It was quite embarrassing for him to give judgment against his learned *guru*.

It was not such an easy task even for a great scholar like Sankara to defeat the stranger straightaway. He was indeed an ocean of learning. But how is it that Sankara never heard about the existence of such a vastly learned man? The intricate points, the subtle analysis, the strong arguments, the deep counterpoints could never come out from ordinary scholars. Sankara was sure that the man was not an ordinary one. He must have appeared before him in the guise of an old man. He must have been some great Saint.

The debate had continued for eight days. It was not an easy task for an ordinary scholar to continue it for such a long time.

Padmapada got puzzled. He did not know how to conduct the debate. Both sides were equally balanced with learning, logic, reasoning and forcefully equipped arguments, presentation of facts and originality in interpretation. Padmapada looked at Sankara. Equally fascinated by the graceful old man's bright face and enlightened argument he found himself dumb founded.

He forgot to give his judgment. He was quiet. Both looked at him.

Sankara asked his illustrious learned disciple why he was suddenly keeping quiet.

To Sankara's utter surprise and pleasant reaction of the stranger Padmapada said :

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Sankara Sankaraschoiba
Vyasastu Bhagawan swayam
Dwayorbibadamane
Kinkaro kimkariswami

Sankara is none but *Shiva* and Maharsi Vyas was an incarnation of divinity. In the debate between the two, what can the ordinary servant, conclude? How can any one take a decision? The disciples were stunned.

Padmapada said with folded hands "This Brahmin is none other than that very Vyas, the knower of the essence of all Vedantas and the author of these *sutras*. He is an incarnation of *Mahavishnu*. And as for yourself, Sir, you are *Shiva* Himself. What are we, your servants, to do when you two clash in such an endless and keen debate.

Sankara said, "What did you say Padmapada? This is Maharsi Vyasa? How do you know? The Maharsi passed away long long ago."

Said Padmapada, "Yes my lord, you only meditate for a moment. You only look at him properly. Otherwise who else in the world can hold such discussion with my *guru* for such a long time. Who else can analyse the intricacies of *Bhagavat Geeta* and *Brahma Sutra* so beautifully.

Maharsi Vyas was looking with a smile. He confirmed Padmapada's guess.

Sankara was delighted at the disciples ready wit and keen power of observation. What an accurate guess!

Sankara touched the feet of Maharsi Vyas. He was happy to have met the learned veteran Saint unexpectedly. He was sure the Maharsi must have some special errand for him from the heaven.

He was keenly waiting for that. Before listening to the special message of the Maharsi, praised the all knowing sage in a hymn which he composed on the spot. Sankara said :

"Thy deer skin covering, rain cloud complexion, white sacred thread, matted locks, and shining diadem reveal thee to be Vyas himself. Thy life and work have mitigated the banefulness of this age of *Kali*. If thou approvest of the commentary I have produced on the Aphorisms

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which deal exhaustively with Truth transcendental and temporal, then deign to pardon my lapses and reveal thy true nature to me."

Maharsi Vyas revealed himself before Sankara.

Sankara with all his disciples fell at the feet of the veteran saint and said, "O sage Dwaipayana I have only done an *arati* by way of honouring it with my commentary. Considering me as a disciple of thine, please pardon me for this fool-hardy venture of mine, and condescend to give a critical estimate of it, correcting whatever mistakes thou findest in it."

Sankara told Vyas, "I have already written the commentaries expounded them and also refuted all hostile doctrines. What else have I got to do? Nothing more. I have come to the end of the sixteen years' span of my life. and so shall presently give up this physical body of mine in thy presence. Please tarry a while at Manikarnika and witness it."

Maharsi Vyasa looked at Sankara and said, "My dear boy, you know who you are. You know why you were sent on earth. You know also how long you were expected to be here. I have a special message for you."

Sankara said, "Yes Maharsi, I was just having a stock taking of my little performance. I thought I had completed my assignment. I was getting ready to take leave from earth any time. I am just going to cross sixteen. I intend to have *Mahasamadhi* in your holy presence".

Yes, that is exactly why I have come here. I have a special message from your beloved Lord Vishnu. You have only presented the theories of Vedanta, the Vedas and Upanishadas in books. You will have to preach them now throughout India. You have to lay the strong foundation of Vedanta in all the four corners of the country. You have to organise institutions to carry out the message of Vedanta. The basis must be laid strongly to revitalise the oldest and highest thoughts on earth as preached and practised by the ancient sages. They had realised this Truth, explored it after thousands of years in deep meditation and certainly should not be thrown into oblivion like this. I request you kindly to stay here for another sixteen years for this purpose.

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Sankara was stunned. So the divine message had come and he could not defy it.

But how to do it? asked Sankara.

My dear Sankara, you have already written the interpretation of Veda and have also taught your disciples quite well in these subjects.

Sankara said with humility, "Yes Maharsi, I tried my best. I think some of them have picked up the lessons quite well. They are well versed in Vedas and Vedanta. Now kindly tell me what to do."

The learned *trikalajna* Maharsi, said, "Don't think Sankara that just by writing these scriptures you have completed the task of reviving them. You will have to bring them to the doors of the masses. Otherwise they will get restricted only to a limited few who will go through them just casually. You know how religion has been mutilated by unwise and orthodox preachers. You know so well how my *Brahmasutra* has been wrongly interpretated and mutilated. You will have to enter into argument with them, try to convince them about their wrong interpretations and defeat them in religious debates in public. Otherwise people will not know anything about *Brahmavidya*, as depicted by the ancient sages and in the holy *Vedas*.

"You know very well that Kumaril Bhatta has already taken up the work. He has already started debates with the learned Buddhist scholars and tried to convince them about the real light of the realised Truth by the Vedas. He has only popularised the *Karmakanda* of the Vedas. The more important portions of *Jnanakanda* of the Vedas have yet to be placed before the masses.

If you say that only by defeating the scholars in debate you win your ground of preaching the *Brahmavidya*, the knowledge of the Brahman, I shall say you will be badly mistaken. I know your learned disciples can do that quite easily. But you must know that mere winning on theories will not serve the purpose. Don't think mere theories will revive the limitless Light of the Vedas.

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Vedas cannot be merely learnt by reading alone. It has to be thoroughly assimilated by realisation. The inner light must be lit by deep meditation, inner exploratiou of self-purity and thirst to know the real light.

You know very well how to realise the *Advaita Brahman.* You have to distribute that knowledge of Truth realisation of *Brahma vidya* through personal guidance as a *Jagatguru.* You will have to regenerate the religious lives of the entire country. They have all forgotten their religious moorings.

So before departing Maharsi repeated, "The satisfaction you gave to Agastya and other sages by your learning won for you an extension of your life's span by eight years more. May you live for another sixteen years by the blessing of God Shiva. May your commentary shine till the end of time. During the rest of your life may you uproot the doctrines of those who oppose the Advaita philosophy and establish in them faith in the doctrine of the unity of all existence."

The veteran saint vanished. Sankara was sad for him. He would now start for his *Dig-vijaya.* The first target was Prayag to meet Kumaril Bhatta, who was a staunch upholder of the ritualistic interpretation of the Vedas.

At Prayag Sankara had a holy dip in Triveni. Now he must meet Kumaril Bhatta.

Kumaril Bhatta had revived the Vedas. It is said that once this greatly learned Brahmin jumped from a mountain to prove the superiority of Vedas over other religious scriptures. He succeeded in upholding his view point but in the process lost one of his eyes. When questioned how he lost his eye, he said it was because he had added "I lost my eye because I uttered the word 'if'".

Kumaril had said, before jumping if Veda be not the superior most among all religious scriptures he would not survive. He asserted he should not have uttered 'if' and raise any doubt at all. He revived Vedic cult of sacrifices. "A master of the Vedas, a deep scholar in all branches of learning and an accomplished dialectician, his wheel of fame was revolving in all the three worlds."

On his way Sankara came to know that Kumaril Bhatta would perhaps not be available for a debate because he was going to kill himself for two sins. First, in his works he had

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rejected the idea of God. This he did only to emphasise the importanee of the Veda to establish that the Veda was self existent and self-certifying and required no *Iswara* or God to establish its truth or validity. What he had done was to reject an Iswara as the cause of the world and not an Iswara who was love and who redeemed the world's sorrows.

Secondly, Kumaril had committed *Guru-droha* or persecution of his own teacher. How did that happen? India had becomc a land of Buddhists and followers of the Vedas came down badly. So Kumaril planned to defeat them and re-establish the supremacy of the Vedas. The Buddhist leaders along with their disciples had gone round the royal courts and converted them to Buddhism. They directly, outrightly rejected the Vedas. They suggested that there were contradictory statement in the Vedas, as such they eannot be accepted as the right type of religious scriptures. He did not find anybody strong enough intellectually to resist this move. Kumaril himself went to contradict the Buddhist scholars. Kumaril had no background of Buddhist philosophy. He had no knowledge of their systm of dialectics. It was a great handicap for him. Without a sound knowledge of Buddhism how could he refute all their arguments? So he went to a monastery in the guise of a Buddhist. He stayed with the students as a *prachchanna* Buddhist. One day a great Buddhist scholar started saying things against the Vedas. The ardent student of the Vedas could not check his tears. This did not evade the notice of his colleagues. They all started suspecting Kumaril. They were doubtful about his identity and intention. They started discussing among themselves about Kumaril. "The fellow must be a Brahmin and an enemy of the Buddhists. He must have come to know the secrets of our philosophy surreptitiously." They all joined hands to throw him out. They all conspired against Kumaril. They physically took him out on a mountain and pushed him down.

"If the Veda is truly revealed knowledge then I shall not be hurt," said Kumaril. He linked the validity of the Veda with his life. Because he used the conditional 'if', expressive of doubt, and because he learnt the Buddhist scriptures by deception he lost one of his eyes in that punishment.

Kumaril thought he had deceived his teacher who taught

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him a whole branch of learning which Kumaril considered heinous.

The whole country knew about it.
Sankara hastend to meet Kumaril.

When Sankara reached Kumaril Bhatta, the latter was getting ready to burn himself to death as an atonement—*prayaschitta* for deceiving his own preceptor. Kumaril was very sad to have offended his own teacher and was making preparation to get killed by *tusanal*. This tusanal is the most cruel way of destroying oneself. A big *kunda* is dug. It is a big pit. Paddy husk is put there in a very big quantity. Then it is burnt. It burns very slowly. The victim has to sit in meditation. It finally consumes the man. The process is time-consuming, painful and pitiable.

Sankara was sad to have met him at this stage. Sankara was well received by disciples of Kumaril. Prabhakara the most learned and loyal disciple of Kumaril took him to the furnace bed by paddy husk.

Kumaril at once recognised the Acharya. They had very little time at their disposal. Sankara hurriedly showed his commentary to Kumaril who although himself a dualist, appreciated the work and said, "An explanatory thesis of at least eight thousand verses will be required even for a single subject like superimposition treated in this work : Had I not taken this vow I would have produced such a Vartikam on your commentary. It is a very rare piece of good fortune to meet such holy men like you, especially at the time of death.

Kumaril was already familiar with the works of Acharya Sankara. He longed to meet him too but had no opportunity. Kumaril believed and was convinced that Sankara was none than Shiva Himself. He pleaded Sankara to give him *sannyas* to which the Acharya readily agreed.

Kumaril knew that he could have been easily saved by Sankara. And Sankara wanted to save him. He could have saved him only by sprinkling water from his *Kamndalu*, the water pot.

Why sprinkling water? Do I not know that you can restore a person to life even long after his death? It is only child's play for you to save me from the slow fire. However I do not

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like to abandon the vow. You are the one who creates and destroys the world. What wonder then if such a person offers to save me. Still I do not want to escape from this self-imposed Vedic vow.

Kumaril insisted to confirm his decision to die in slow fire. But requested Acharya to initiate him to Brahma Vidya. Sankara obliged him.

Then Kumaril told the Saint, "If you could manage to defeat Mandana Misra famous among scholars as the greatest exponent of the ritualistic interpretation of the Vedas, your path for the establishment of the doctrincs of Advaita as the true Vedic teaching will be clear of all obstacles. His defeat will be equivalent to the defeat of all scholars of this school. He is the champion of the gospel of ritualistic works and of life in the world. He is ever engaged in the performance of rituals. He is a householder of great wealth, fame and learning. You have got to defeat this great opponent of the path of renunciation, and for this I would advise you to go to his place immediately. His wife Ubhaya Bharati is also a great scholar. It is said that she is Saraswati herself born in a human body because of the curse of sage Durvasa. Mandana is superior even to me in his mastery of philosophy of work. And among my disciples, he is the one dearest to me. Engaging yourself in debate with him, with Ubhaya Bharati as the umpire, you have to defeat him and make him your disciple. You can then entrust him with the duty of writing annotations of your works."

Mandana Mishra was living at the splendid city of Mahishmati surrounded with palm groves. So Sankara started for Mandana's house along with his disciples.

Sankara was told that even the servants of the house would talk in Sanskrit. He was still thrilled when somebody told him that not only the servants, even parrots would chirp in Sanskrit in Mandana Mishra's house,

Kumaril Bhatta had told Sankara that in the debate between Sankara and Mandana, the moderator might be Mandana's learned wife Ubhaya Bharati.

Sankara was eager to have a debate soon with such a brilliant scholar. Who was this Mandana Mishra?

Mandana Mishra had a number of names—all equally famous and popular. Among the scholars he was known as

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Mandana Mishra. His parents called himViswampa. His friends called him Oomveka, His work *Brahmasiddhi* had made him widely known in the circle of scholars. After his *sannyas* he became known as Sureswara. About Mandana's residence there is controversy. Some say he hailed from the capital of Kashmir. Vyasachala, on the other hand tells us that Mandana was a resident of Mahishmati in Vidarbha. Anantanandagiri says that Mandana lived in Bijlabindu near Hastinapur. Telang tells us that Mahishmati is mentioned in Raghuvamsa as situated on the bank of Narmada. In the *Magha* it is represented as the capital of Sisupala. Anantanandagiri's Bijlabindu is somewhere near Delhi. It is quite probable that like his *guru* Mandana too visited all these places and was quite popular with the *elite* in all these places.

In the description of marriage of Bharati we find that Mandana hailed from Kashmir. Bharati was Saraswati, the goddess of learning. She had come to earth because of a curse of Durvasa. Durvasa was once singing Vedic *mantras* along with others out of tune. Saraswati laughed at him and got the curse. But at the request of all the sages said she would be returning to heaven "When she happens to see God *Shiva* in his incarnation as the *sannyasin* Sankara."

Both Bharati and Mandana were top intellectuals of their time. They had fallen in love with each other and got married. They saw each other only at the marriage platform but knew about each other's deep learning and brilliance and were attracted to each other so much that they were pining for union.

Before marriage she was the most learned lady of her place. After marriage she became the most learned lady of Kashmir. So her name changed from Bharati to Ubhaya Bharati i.e. Saraswati of both the places.

All the descriptions were correct. A parrot was chirping in Sanskrit. The house of Mandana Mishra was finally located. But nobody was allowed to get in. Instead of a cordial reception from such a learned house what Sankara got was far from satisfaction.

Sankaracharya was slightly disappointed. His disciples pleaded before the students of Mandana Mishra that Sankara was coming from such a long distance. It was indeed parti-

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cularly to meet Mandana only that they had undertaken the long journey. They also gave the details of their *guru*.

But who listens to them?

On the contrary the students observed that not only that they could not get in to disturb their Master, they had just been posted on the spot to stop anybody from setting in. They were, in fact, ordered to drive away anybody who came near the door. They requested Sankara's party to leave the spot without any further delay.

The disciples did not know what to do. They were only waiting for Sankara's instructions.

Sankara did a miracle.

He entered the house in defiance of the order of Mandana Mishra. He scaled the high wall in *sukshma deha*. It was through a yogic exercise that Sankara squeezed his body, made it so light, raised himself above the normal space and appeared before Mandana Mishra who was completely taken aback. He was, in brief, in fury. Mandana fumed in anger. He called his disciples and cursed them. The disciples expressed their helplessness and explained how the monk had scaled the wall through yogic exercises only.

Once getting in, Sankara was the last person to get out of the scholar's house. He simply stood there firm and calm. He was only waiting for the ensuing religious duel. Mandana was getting angry, crossing all limits. He forgot the ordinary courtesies and started hurling all sorts of abusive languages.

The discussion was more than real fight.

In great anger Mandana burst out into a series of abusive interrogations :

"Whence have you come, you shaven headed fellow?"

The discourtesy was because of two reasons. First, in a ritual ceremony the presence of a monk is not welcome. Secondly, all the doors were closed. It was a miracle that Sankara had presented himself there without opening any gate.

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Sankara paid little heed to Mandana's discourtesy. One's demeanour only shows his own culture. It reflects only his breeding. So one may ignore it outright.

Now Mandana's sentence had two meanings. It also meant how far are you shaven.

Sankara replied "up to the neck". He said with a touch of humour. Mandana was doubly angry.

That is not what I asked. I asked how did you come here. I asked about your way.

— Did you ask the way? Then what did the 'way' reply? Mandana lost his temper.

— It replied that your mother is a widow and that you are a widow's son.

Sankara was cool. With a touch of humour he said, "Indeed; Did the 'way' tell you that you are a widow's son? Then it must surely be so. For it was you and not myself who questioned the 'way' and in the answer you received the 'you' must surely refer to 'yourself'!

Mandana was becoming impatient.

Mandana — O vicious fellow! Is it that you have abandoned your sacred thread and your tuft because they are too much of a burden to you? But having abandoned them you seem to have burdened yourself with a bundle of rags too heavy even for asses.

Sankara — Even your father would not bear this load of a *Sannyasin's* rags that I am carrying. Instead he continued to bear like an ass the burden of a wife till the end in spite of getting kicks from her. For the life of the housholder characterised by tuft and sacred thread, is, in the eyes of the sruti, a mere burden for a man full of the spirit of renunciation. O fool of a fellow, You who cannot grasp it must be a man of little understanding.

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Mandana — The world knows what your much vaunted *Brahma—nishtha* is—it is loafing about with a bundle of books and a brood of disciples owing to one's incapacity to feed one's wife and look after her.

Sankara — And pray what is your *karma nistha*? It means to become the servant of a woman after abandoning the service of the teacher owing to your incapacity to continue for long as a celibate Brahmacharin.

Mandana — O fool! You were born of a woman. It was again a woman that brought you up. And still you are so ungrateful as to hate a woman.

Sankara — Having been born of a woman's womb and fed at her breast, still how can you oh Prince among brutes bring yourself to seek sensuous enjoyments in her company like an animal?

Mandana — You are a thief, you eat your food without giving to *sannyasins* and *Brahmacharins* their share as laid down in the scriptures.

Sankara pointed out to innumerable grammatical mistakes and subtle meanings of the expressions of Mandana.

The scholars who came to attend the ritualistic ceremony noticed that throughout the debate Sankara was calm, humourous and to the point. Mandana was proud, angry and was talking out of points.

Then an interesting incident took place. Suddently Maharsi Vijas appeared along with Jaimini. He admonished Mandana for his ill treatment of the monk. At his direction Mandana extended an invitation to Sankara and his party to *bhiksha*.

Sankara replied that he did not care for *bhiksha* like food. He begged *bara bhiksha*, i.e. a religious debate on condition that the defeated one should become the disciple of the victor.

Sankara said, "My only object in life is to spread the teaching of the Vedanta everywhere as the true gospel for men to follow for the attainment of salvation. I have not got the least interest in anything else. The Vedanta is the only panacea

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for man's ill in *samsara*. It is a veritable moon far those suffering from the heat of worldly existence. Abandoning it, you are revelling in the cult of sacrifices. My mission in life is to establish the truth of the Vedanta by defeating in debate all who hold an opposite view. So either accept the truth of Vedanta forthwith, or come for a debate and accept the Vedanta after defeat in debate."

Mandana Mishra accepted the challenge. Next morning in the presence of a galaxy of learned men, Sankara appeared on the scene with his disciples. Ubhaya Bharati, the learned wife of Mandana and an incarnation of Saraswati was in the chair. She was accepted by both to be the moderator in the debate.

It was quite an embarrassing assignment for Bharati to give any judgment. On one side was Sankara, an incarnation of Shiva, on another Mandana, her husband who was an incarnation of Brahma.

Bharati was intelligent beyond doubt. She introduced an ideal method of judgment. She put two garlands on the necks of both contestants. She said, "That person is to be considered defeated whose garland is seen to fade."

The wreath withers in heat. A person who wins will never lose temper. He will remain calm and cool and naturally his garland will remain fresh.

Bharati also arranged for food for both the parties.

For first six days both remained calm and cool and there was no sign of any body's victory or defeat. Sankara changed his strategy as Madhava Vidyaranya tells us, "Finding Mandana capable of taking mighty intellectual punches, Sankara directed an all out offensive at his thesis, whereupon Mandana found it difficult to maintain his position or give proper answers to the objections raised by his opponent. Thereupon, abandoning the defence of his own thesis, Mandana now launched on an elaborate criticism of the Advaita doctrine expounded by the Upanishads."

The debate continued for sixteen days. Finally Ubhaya Bharati declared the victory of Sankara over her husband but not before throwing a challenge to Sankara to defeat her in an intellectual debate.

"I am his better half. Before finally defeating my husband you have to defeat me. I am his *ardhangini*, the better half."

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Bharati started a debate afresh. She put three questions on *Kama Shastra*, on the science of Love.

She insisted that unless Sankara could defeat her too, her husband would not accompany him as his monk disciple.

Sankara was in difficulty. He never studied the art of love making.

Sankara took two fortnights' time from Bharati to acquaint himself to the art of *Kama Shastra*.

It is not only from books that one can get knowledge of love making. The saint found it difficult to acquire first hand practical knowledge. Luckily the party got the news of death by accident of King Amaruka who just died while hunting. Sankara decided to enter that dead body, go to the palace and learn the art and return to his own body. Meanwhile the disciples must fully look after his body. If it were burnt or eaten by animal he had no way of returing to his original life.

The funeral pyre for the dead king Amaruka was ready. The whole court was in mourning. Suddenly the body started showing signs of life. The whole kingdom was in a great gay mood. Their king has been saved by a miracle they all thought.

Amaruka was a great ruler. He was very popular. So there was rejoicing everywhere in the kingdom.

Before Sankara left his own body and entered the royal one his beloved and learned disciple Padmapada had warned him against getting lost in royal glamour and earthly pleasures. Padmapada told his guru, "There is nothing unknown to an omniscient personage like you. Yet I shall speak a few words out of my love for and devotion to you. It seems, in days of yore, a great yogi named Matsyendra, entrusting his own body to his disciple Goraksha, entered the body of a dead king and thereby got access into his palace. While the yogi thus reigned as the king, prosperity attended that kingdom. Timely rain brought bounteous harvest. Observing all this, it occured to his ministers that some great soul must have entered into the dead body of the king. So they advised his consorts to use all their amorous skill to keep the king completely absorbed in love sports, so that he might not leave the body. The king got so immersed in the emotional display of these women, their amorous advances, soft

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laughter, sweet songs and lovely dances—that he forgot everything about *samadhi* and spiritual matters, and behaved excatly like a sensuous man. Coming to know of the change that had come over his teacher, the disciple Goraksha, after duly preserving his teacher's body in a secure place, came disguised as a dance instructor and got access to the inner apartment for women. He attracted the king's attention, and by instructing him about spiritual truth he destroyed the king's thirst for sense of enjoyment. By regaining his power of yoga, Matsyendra was able to leave the king's body and re-enter his own. From this it is seen how strong and irresistible sense attraction is."

Sankara enjoyed his beloved disciple's warning. The whole palace got puzzled. How could their king Amaruka became so learned? How has he turned so grave? The queen was surprised at the demeanour of her husband. He would not like even to come near her. Such a loving husband as Amaruka was how could he suddenly become so indifferent to her? The ministers had never such wise cousel from the king before. How did it happen suddenly? They all sat together. They had their doubts. This must be the soul of some great saint. By yogic practice the soul must have entered the body of the king and must have come here with definite purpose. They proclaimed orders for a thorough search for a dead body of some learned saint or monk in the forest.

Sankara was gaining knowledge of *Kama*. The whole forest was searched thoroughly. The disciples were terribly upset. About a month had already passed. And they did not know how to save the body any more.

They started weeping. They were wailing.

Under the leadership of Padmapada the disciples entered the palace of King Amaruka as musicians. They were stunned. They saw a scene beyond their apprehension. "There in the music hall of the palace they saw their teacher surrounded by a bevy of beauties like moon thronged by the stars. Behind him were handsome women waiving the royal accompaniment of the sweet sounds produced by their jingling bracelets, and in front were other ladies expert in music, filling the whole hall with the melodious tunes of their musical instruments."

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Without wasting any time the disciples started their music. They sang:

> On honey sucker, we, your companion bees guarding your body on the wooden top of a mountain peak have long been most anxiously awaiting your return. It seems in your anxiety to master the science of sex-love, you have been living here, abandoning your own body!

The king came to realise his own life. He realised his own identity.

Meanwhile the king's men had discovered the dead body of the saint. They arranged a funeral pyre and put it on it. Without any delay they set fire to it.

Sankara had just left his royal body. King Amaruka fell dead. Sankara found the pyre was already in fire. He chanted a prayer in glory of Lakshmi-Nrisimha, the fire got subsided. The party left for Mandana Misra's house.

Ubhaya Bharati was defeated. She realised that the curse period was over. She had been blessed by Sankara and went back to her heavenly place. Mandana Misra took *sannyas*. The Acharya gave him a new name—Sureswara.

When the saint set up four *maths* in four corners of the country, he had put Sureswara in charge of Sringeri Math. The monks under this order are known as *Saraswati, Puri, or Bharati*. Brahmacharins under the order are known as *Chaitanya*. They follow the *Yajurveda*. Tungabhadra is their sacred river. Their deity is *Adi Baraha*. Their *adhisthatri* Devi is *Kamakshi*.

The Acharya is on his *Digvijaya*. Disciples have started joining him. All self enlightned souls are surrounding him to assist the Master in his great divine mission. He is moving round triumphantly defeating the non-believers. With him along with his disciples, is also moving the collection of treatises. It was an ideal moving library. The Acharya of Gokarna has joined, so has the Acharya of Mukambika. Now the saint has reached the famous village known as Sri Bali. It was a city of learned Brahmins. There was a beautiful smell of incense throughout the journey. There was a beautiful temple of Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati.

Among hundreds of visitors there was one whose name was

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Prabhakara. He was a learned scholar, quite well-to-do and much respected. He had everything and yet he had nothing. He was an extremely unfortunate man. He had no peace of mind. His only son was deaf and dumb. He was just a lump of flesh. He was ten years old but did not have any power of speech, hearing of understanding. So Prabhakara and his wife were very sad.

Prabhakara was only waiting for an opportunity to meet the Acharya. He had heard like others, about the miraculous power of the saint. Only the other day, Sankara, had given life to a poor woman's dead son through his yogic spell.

Was it because of possession of some ghostly spirit that the child was behaving that way. Or was it due to his past actions of *Karma* ? Or was it just an ordinary freak of nature?

Prabhakara was a rich person. He thought of meeting the saint along with his wife and son. He followed the injunction of religious ethics—that none should visit a monk empty handed—by carrying a basket of fruits for the sannyasi. On meeting him he placed the fruits and the child at the feet of the master.

Sankara had the look at the boy affectionately. The child had a bright face. There was a glow on his face. His father asked him to prostrate before the saint. He rather made him physically do so. But the boy would only remain in that position. He would not stand up in spite of his father's repeated requests.

They all had taken him to be an idiot.

His father said, "He is now ten years old and his mind seems to be undeveloped. He has not even learnt the alphabets, not to speak of the Vedas. The early period of his life has thus gone in vain. Boys of his age come and call him for play, but he does not join them. Seeing him sitting silent, boys beat him; still he will not show any sign of annoyance. Sometimes he comes for food, sometimes he abstains from all food. He does not heed any instruction. I never try to rectify him by punishment, but have left it to his fate to direct his future".

Sankara lifted the child from his prostrated position. He looked at his face. He touched his head by his merciful hand. And Sankara asked him who he was.

Everybody was looking at the child and the Acharya. How

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will the child reply ? He is deaf and dumb ? To the surprise of all, the child talked. He said, "O" great teacher ! Certainly I am not an inert thing. Even an inert thing becomes conscious in association with me. I am one with undivided bliss free from the six states of grief, infatuation, hunger, thirst, old age and death as also from the six conditions of beginning, continuance, growth, change, decay and destruction. This consciousness of the *Atman* is common to all liberated ones." The child gave easily this great philosophy describing the knowledge of self in twelve verses. People saw with stunning surprise a dumb child giving the description of the self so easily before the saint as if he was keeping in his hand the little *Amalaka* fruit. The Master was happy with his interpretation.

The Saint told Pandit Prabhakara that his son was not an ordinary human being. He was not meant for running a family life. He was to lead the life of a monk. So he asked Pandit Prabhakara's permission to take the child with him.

The learned Pandit was happy to get his son as a perfectly learned man. He was equally sad to part with him immediately after this great revelation. They were all surprised that all these years they were mistaking a *Brahmajnani* boy as a mere deaf and dumb child. He was *Brahmajnani* in the truest sense of the term otherwise how could a boy who was never introduced to the letters utter amazingly beautiful self composed highly literary and philosophical poetry. He had no attachment to anything. He never felt for his own body.

Pandit Prabhakara readily agreed to give away the learned son to the saint. He knew one thing. In his company the child was definitely not very happy. In the saintly company he might be happy. The saint might make use of him in some way or the other. He agreed. The saint took charge of the boy. Pandit Prabhakara also followed the party upto a considerable distance. He had double suffering—getting a *Brahmajnani* son and finally parting with him.

Much later the saint himself gave a vivid account of Hastamalakacharya's background. He said, 'Do you know who was this Hastamalak ?

Hastamalak too was present there.
Everybody looked at him eagerly.

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Sankara said, "One day Pandit Prabhakara's wife went to have a bath in the river Yamuna with a two-year old son. A yogi was living there. She kept the child with the yogi and went to the river to have her dip. After some time the yogi became indifferent and the child fell down in the river. The child was lifted on the bank but unfortunately did not survive. The Brahmani would not stop her crying and the yogi did not know what to do. It was because of his carelessness that the lady had lost her son. He suddenly entered the body of the child through yogic power. Prabhakara's wife got her child back but never told anybody about the incident.

Acharya Hastamalak was one of the four main disciples of the saint. He was put by the Master as in-charge of one of the four *Maths—Sharada Math.* The followers of the Math are designated *teertha*, or *ashrama.* The Bramacharis belonging to this order are known as *Swarupa.* They follow the *Sama Veda.* Their sacred river is Gomati. The deity they worship is *Siddeswara* and the *adhisthatri* devi is *Bhadrakali.* Sankara now reached Sringagiri, popularly known as Sringeri. It was here that the great Risya Sringa Muni meditated on the supreme self for a long time. Near the holy place quietly flows the river Tungabhadra. It was a sacred place. Sankara had a great desire to instal the Divine Mother Sharada who had promised Sankara that she would reside wherever he would invoke her in future. So he installed her at Sringeri under the name of Sharada and there she resides even to this day granting devotees their prayers.

It was at Sringeri that a new disciple Giri joined the Master. Giri was an incarnation of devotion. He knew nothing except his Master. The day he joined the order he took full charge of the Saint's personal services. He would do everything himself allowing the fellow colleagues to concentrate on religious discourses and lessons. They would spend their time in meditation and discussion with the guru. Giri would simply keep himself in serving them all. His obedience, his dilligence, his righteousness, his keen sense of anticipation of the saint's needs became proverbial. For instance, he would take his bath first of all because he was to make all arrangements for his personal needs. He would shampoo the guru's feet, give him a bath like a mother, feed him with utmost care and would

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follow him like a shadow till he went to sleep. Giri would not open his mouth before his guru. He was an illiterate fellow, no doubt, but he never talked even to his fellow colleagues who always looked upon him with compassion and pity. They all had sympathy for the poor man because he had no knowledge even of the alphabets.

Giri never cared for learning. He did not run after lessons. He knew only his loyal devoted service to the Guru. So Giri and Guru became one.

Sankara was very much fond of this devoted disciple. He found one rare thing in him. That was his unstinted loyalty. This loyalty he wholeahertedly offered to Sankara, not even caring for God or anybody else. He did not care for lessons, because he felt it redundant. It was simply not necessary for a man who could surrender himself completely at the feet of his Master. He was ready to accept whatever was bestowed to him by his illustrious guru. And besides serving him wholeheartedly Giri did not even sit for meditation literally. In his sleep, in his dream, in his daily prayer he had only one point in mind—that was how to serve the Master well. What does the Master need next. What will keep him fit?

Sankara was delaying his discourses that day. Perhaps he was doing so intentionally. All the other disciples were already present in the session. It is a daily routine class taken by the Acharya. It is not compulsory for Giri. Giri of course, attends it daily, not with a view to learning any lesson, he stands there in a corner to check whether the Master would be needing something sometime.

The disciples were becoming restless. What had happened? Why is the Acharya not starting the class yet ?

Finally Sankara himself asked, "Where is Giri ? How is it that I don't find him here now ? Where has he gone ?"

Disciples were a little surprised. What will that illiterate fellow do in the class of advanced philosophy of *Advaitavad* ?

Sankara knew the feelings of his disciples towards Giri. He used to feel hurt but never expressed anything.

Said Sankara, "Call Giri. Search him. There cannot be any class today without Giri."

Why does the Acharya behave like this today, they thought. Some went to search Giri. Giri was not at all in a hurry. He

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was washing the garments of the *guru* at the *ghat*. He was little surprised when the errand reached him. He rushed immediately. It was not for the class. He does not care for the class. It was the call of the guru. It was the vioce of Sankara. He must need something.

He came running. With folded hands Giri stood before Sankara. "Yes my Lord here I am. Order me what is that you want me to do ?" Said Sankara, "Giri, you have been listening to my lectures everyday. Isn't it ? Today I have no intention to take the class. I want you to take the class."

Learned disciples like Padmapada said, what will the fellow so dull as the wall teach'? Giri, the illiterate, the foolish disciple of Sankara did take the class that day!

Mukang karoti bachalong Pangumg langhayate girim,
Jat kripa tvamaham vande Paramananda Madhavam

By His grace the dumb becomes a talkative one, the lame crosses the high mountains ! And for that what is too difficult for Giri ? Giri started his lesson in Sanskrit and in the *Totaka* metre.

Sankara was only looking at him. Was he not awakening the inner self of Giri ? Simply by an act of will Sankara transmitted in him the knowledge of fourteen subjects.

The substances of his speech was :

"On the supporting tree of the Acharya grows the creeper of devotion, taking its root at his own feet and watered by his grace. On that creeper, on the stalk called *Totaka* has grown this fruit of a wonderful poem which will for all time be relished by the superb parrots, the men of wisdom. Devotion to the guru is an aid like a ladder that helps man in ascending to that high sky—transcending state of spiritual absorption, from which all the three worlds look very small. What wonder if the veil of ignorance was so rapidly dispelled in one who knew the proper use of this aid."

The spellbound disciples abandoned their pride. They could realise by unstinted loyal devotion for the Guru their colleague had acquired this great knowledge, poetical skill and inner light.

The poem is a unique piece of literature, philosophy and inner light born out of great devotion and firm faith in the

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preceptor. Sankara gave Giri a new name. He named him Totakacharya. It has been said by none less than Madhava Vidyaranya,

> "This brief but superbly beautiful, well-reasoned and profound poem in *Totaka* metre, introductory to the study of the Vedanta, is even to this day known among scholars as *Totaka* metre. Receiving the new name of Totaka from the Acharya, and equallying Padmapada himself in learning and intelligence, he came to be known as one of the chief disciples of Sankara. On seeing these four principal disciples of the Acharya—Hastamalaka, wise men wondered whether they were the four Vedas themselves embodied or the four *Purusharthas*—human ends, *Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha*—taken shape or the four faces of Brahma manifest, or the four forms of liberation—*Salokya, Samippya, Sarupya and Sayujya*—taken shape and come to reside among men."

The whole incident took place only to teach the learned disciples about *Guru mahima*. Nothing like the blessing of the Guru. A person who gets the blessings of his Guru needs no other spiritual lesson. A disciple who can surrender himself wholeheartedly at the feet of his *Guru* is fully protected by his grace. Totaka is an ideal devotee who turned a new corner in the realm of Indian spiritual life. He was to Sankara what Lord Hanuman was to Ramachandra.

As one of the four principal disciples of Sankara, Totaka was made Acharya of *Jyotirmath*. The monks of this order are known as *Giri, Parbat or Sagar*. Brahmacharis are known as *Ananda*. They follow *Atharva Veda*. Their main holy river is Alakananda. Their main deity is *Narayana* and the *adhisthatri Devi* is *Punyagiri*.

Sankara was engrossed in the thoughts at Sringeri. Suddenly he felt something unusual. On his tongue there was the taste of mother's milk. What does it signify ?

In no times the all-knowing saint could discover that his mother was in her deathbed. She was remembering her beloved son.

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Sankara remembered his promise to the Mother.

He had given word of honour to his mother that he would do the *agni sanskar*, the last rites of enkindling the funeral pyre himself.

The mother was waiting only to have a last look of her illustrious son. Sankara rcached his mother immediately. He covered this long distance through *yogic* power.

It was a meeting after twenty four years ! He left his mother when he was only eight. Now he is a young world famous saint of thirty two. The mother knew that the saint child would certainly keep his promise. She was only counting days. She could not check her tears.

The saint forgot all the formalities of a monk life. A monk normally does not conduct the last rites. He forgot his *monolithic* doctrine of *Advaita*. He started praying to *Vishnu*. The mother was a great worshipper of *Vishnu*. Sankara had promised that he would enable his mother to have vision of *Vishnu*. So he started meditating on the Lord. Aryamba joined the son in his prayers. The little hut was full with fountain of light. The mother saw *Vishnu* before her. She happily breathed her last.

Sankara approached his relations to assist him in conducting the last rites of the mother. Not only that the dishonest relatives did not come out to help him at this critical time, they bluntly hurled abuses at him and his dead mother. They thought Sankara had turned a monk at an early age when he did not attain maturity. Now that he had earned name and fame as a learned man he had returned home to settle down. They were afraid that Sankara might ask them to return his due share of property. Sankara was pained at their behaviour. He, in fact, became angry at their abusive language about his mother. He alone lit the funeral pyre in the courtyard of the hut. He cursed them and said : they would all have to do their last rites in the courtyard of their houses; no monk would ever accept their hospitality and they would not be allowed to recite the *Vedic* scriptures.

The relatives were upset. They all fell at Sankara's feet and asked for pardon. Sankara had withdrawn only the third curse and allowed them to have access in reciting the *Vedic* scriptures. Even today the Brahmins of Kaladi follow the other two

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strictures on his relatives religiously. None accepts their hospitality. None joins them in their funeral rites. They have to cremate dead bodies in their own compounds. "One should not insult or trouble another, seeing that he is a very mild person. All of sudden, he may become angry unexpectedly, just as fire can come out of piece of a sandalwood tree when struck, in spite of its parts being cool and sweet smelling. Thus curse may look contrary to the high ideal of a *sannyasin*. But the actions of men of transcending greatness should never be condemned."

Bhagwan Sankaracharya was the *Vishwaguru* or world preceptor of the *Kaliyug*. In the Saint's own words :

Krite Vishwa gurubrahma
Tretayang Hrishisattamah
Dwapare Vyasa eba syat
Kalabatra bhabamyaham

During *Satyayug*, Brahma was the world preceptor. During *Tretayuga* the greatest of the Saints Vashistha was the world preceptor. During *Dwapara*, Vyas was the world peeceptor. During *Kaliyuga*, I am the world preceptor.

Among all the saints of India Sankara can be compared with only one of his predecessors—Bhagwan Shukdeva. Shukdeva was the ideal son of Vyasadeva. Vyas meditated for a saintly son with inner glow of enlightenment. According to the *Puranas*, Shukdeva would not come out of mother's womb because he was afraid of worldly attachment. Then Vyas prayed to Lord Vishnu who temporarily withdrew *maya* (worldly attachment) from the world and the incarnation of knowledge, Bhagwan saintly Shukdeva was born. His is the most perfect and ideal life among all the ancient saints of India. Acharya Sankara belongs to the Shukdeva group of saints.

Both Shukdeva and Sankara were always deeply engrossed in meditation of the Supreme Brahman, both observed celibacy for the whole life, both were the most learned of their age, both led most perfectly saintly lives, both were quiet, patient *yogis* and deeply devoted to their ideals. In some respects perhaps Sankara had surpassed Shukdeva.

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Shukdeva in some previous life heard about the divine knowledge as taught by Shiva. Sankara himself was an incarnation of Shiva. Shukdeva was a perfect Saint but he never performed the duties of an *acharya*; he never preached it. He was not acclaimed as a *Viswa guru* or world preceptor. Sankaracharya was.

The present Hindu philosophy owes a great deal to the saint. He not only realised Truth, he preached and practised it and popularised *Vedanta* throughout the country. He appeared at a time when the entire Hindu philosophy was in an extremely bad shape. Not only the Hindu philosophy, the whole religious life of the people was in a chaotic condition. Sankara describes this miserable plight of religion in the Land of Gods in his *Brahmasutra*: "He who upholds that the people of old were no more capable of conversing with the gods than people are at present might as well hold that because there is at present no ruler paramount (*sarvabhauma*), there were no such sovereign rulers even in former times; or he might argue that in former times the vocations and duties pertaining to the different classes and stations in life were as generally unsettled as they are now."

It was not an easy task for Sankara to reform the religious outlook of millions of his countrymen scattered all over a vast land, geographically and administratively divided, politically different from part to part and emotionally living in disharmony and dissention.

Sankara did it. He covered India from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari and from Dwaraka to Puri and after thoroughly convincing the people of these localities about the importance of Sanatan Hindu religion as envisaged and revealed in the Vedas left permanent imprints there. He erected four *Maths* or monasteries at four corners of the land. These are like four fortresses in defence of the *Sanatan* religion. In the North, Joshi *math* or Jyotirmath near Badarikashram. In the South, Shringeri math at Rameswar Kshetra. In the east, at Purushattama Kshetra at Puri, the Gobardhana Math and at the west, at Dwarka, Kshetra the Sharada Math.

The monks of the order of Sankara are called *Dasanamis* because they are *Asrama, Vana, Aranya, Giri, Parvata, Sagara,*

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Saraswati, Bharati, Puri and Tirtha. All the monks of India must belong to one of these ten orders. That is why Sankara is described as *Jagat Guru.*

Sankara went to Kamarupa in Assam to meet Abhinava Gupta, a Shakta scholar whom he defeated there. The scholar had a large following. They knew occult miracles through which they wanted to kill Sankara. Sankara fell sick and started vomiting blood. Padmapada took him to Kedarnath. Sankara had just completed thirty two years and had done his works as designed. So he entered a cave where he finally disappeared one day and none could trace his body.

Summing up the great works of the greatest Saint of India Sister Nivedita wrote, "In the course of a few years, to have nominated the founders of no less than ten great religious orders of which four fully retain their prestige to the present day; to have acquired to create a distinct philosophy and impress himself on the scholarly imagination of India which is a pre-eminence that 1200 years have not sufficed to shake; to have written poems whose grandeur makes him unmistakable even to foreign and unlearned ears and at the same time to have lived with his disciples, in all the radiant love and simple pathos of the Saints—this is the greatest that we must appreciate but cannot understand."

Renunciation and complete devotion to God is the final aim of human life, says the *Maha yogin.*

"O fool ! abandon the desire for amassing wealth, cultivate good thoughts in your mind. Devote your mind to righteousness and let dispassion be your law. Content your mind with what you earn through the deeds performed by your previous *Karma*", says Sankara.

The Master says, "Ever remember that riches bring grief; indeed no joy abides in them. A rich man even fears his own son, this happens everywhere."

The whole world is just an illusion. Sankara says, "The illusion of *Sansara* is due solely to an illusory notion and is not an absolute reality." There cannot be a greater truth.

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SAINT BHASKARA

(NINTH CENTURY AD)

Buddhism flourished in India for centuries. It became a part of Indian culture and way of life.

Revival of *Vedanta* by Bhagwan Sankaracharya was a silent revolution in the spiritual life of the country. Sankara was not only the most learned scholar saint of his time but was a great organiser. He knew pretty well that mere learning won't serve any purpose. He laid the basic foundation of revival of *Sanatan dharma* and *Vedanta* mainly through the *maths* throughout the country. The *dashnami sampradaya*, the ten different groups of monks, even today, owe their allegiance to the saint. He was not only a path-finder sage, he was by and large a great—in fact, one of the greatest, preachers of the land.

His teachings were accepted by all.

Some devoted souls, however, felt the need of a deity before whom they would offer their prayers. At least at the initial stage a personal God is a necessity. May be, after full God-realisation, one fully-enlightened soul may not go for any sectarian idol.

Bhaskara was one of the earliest saints connected with the philosophy of personal God. He was one of the pioneer saints who made God-realisation possible by making the notion easier through a personal God. Sankara had been the pioneer in the field of reviving *Vedanta* and *Sanatan* Hindu religion no doubt. He also gave some of the finest hymns on *Shiva* and yet he did not give the ideal of a personal God.

It was through different interpretations of the *Brahma Sutras* that the different sages and seers propounded their theories. It was from the theory of *Paramatman* that the different sectarian Gods are mainly derived. Sankara, no doubt, was deeply devoted. None can question his devotional lean-

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ings. But he "relegated *Iswara* to a secondary stage". Inspite of his deep spiritual messages he "had (thereby) made the religious position rather insecure". Extolling a non-differential *Brahman* a series of Saints went back to a personal God and denied the illusory character of the *jivas* and world. The foremost among them was Bhaskara. The others who followed him in this field through commentaries in *Brahma sutras* were Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka, Srikanta or Nilakanta, Vallabha and Baladeva.

Bhaskara's interpretation of *Vedanta* forms an important role in Indian philosophy. He is mainly known for his commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* which is popularly known as *Bhaskarabhasya*. The treatise was in circulation as early as 900 A.D.

Bhaskara was known to have leaning towards *Shiva*. He was among the first who declared that there was no distinction between *Vishnu* and *Shiva*.

In a congregation of religious discourses held in Kanchipuram the saint declared

Mahesvare va jagatam adhisvara
Janardane va jagadantaratmani
Na vastubhedapratipattir asti me
Tathapi basktis tarunendu

The saint pays tribute to both *Mahesvara* that is *Shiva* and *Janardana* that is *Vishnu* and says there is no distinction between the two.

Bhaskarabhasya "is not a sectarian work and does not favour either Sankara's views or those of Pancharatra *Vaishnavas*". Bhaskara is known for his famous theory of *bhedabhedavada*. This is a doctrine *par excellence*. It insists "unity and multiplicity are equally real."

According to Bhaskara, "*Brahman* is not an undifferentiated mass of pure consciousness but possesses all perfections. The causal state of *Brahman* is regarded as a unity, while its evolved condition is one of multiplicity".

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Bhaskara maintains

Karyarupena nanatvam

Abhedah Karatnatmana

Interpreting Bhaskara, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says, "Things are non-different in their causal and generic aspects and different as effects and individuals. Non-difference does not absorb difference as fire consumes grass. The two are equally real."

Bhaskara believes in "real evolution—*parinama*"

Bhaskariyas tu cidachidamsavibhakthim

Brahmadraieyam achidamsena vikriyate

Bhaskara was perhaps the first to challenge the *mayava*d (illusion theory) of Sankaracharya as "unauthentic."

There is nothing wrong. One must note the tremendous impact of Buddhism on Hindu philosophy prevailing during that period. It is quite probable and possible that Sankara could not avoid the touch of Buddhist influence.

Bhaskara stood for doctrine of identity in difference. Although scholars always attribute the whole doctrine to Bhaskara, he was not the original founder of the theory. That credit goes to Oudhulumi. Bhaskara popularised it. The original work, in fact, is out of circulation. Vyas, the ancient sage mentions about it in his *Brahma sutras*. Bhaskara in his own interpretation of *Brahma sutras* also mentions views of *Vedanta*. Both vehemently opposed *mayavada* of Sankara. It is clear that they must have been living after Sankara. Sankara's date being (788 A.D. 820 A.D.), it is presumed the other two flourished in the beginning of the ninth century.

The philosophy of identity in difference got quite good response among thinkers.

Bhaskara said, "*Brahman* is one without a second, the unchangeable reality, endowed with blessed attributes, including the power to create, sustain, and dissolve the universe. He is the formless, personal God who in his causal state is transcendental beyond time, space and causation. In his aspect as

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effect, he has evolved or become transformed into the empirical universe. Since *Brahman*, the infinite, has made himself finite, he is real though he, the Infinite, is not necessarily conditioned by the finitude."

"*Brahman*" says Bhaskara, "as cause contains the whole universe potentially within himself, and the universe is the cause actualised, though in part only, since the cause has not exhausted itself in the effect."

Again the saint says, "*Brahman* is both *jiva*, or the individual soul, and the world. He is endorsed with the power of two kinds : *bhogya* the kind which evolves as the objective universe and *bhakti* the kind which evolves as living souls. This power of *Brahman* is not *maya* but is real in the absolute sense."

The last sentence is a dig at Sankara.

Explaining Bhaskara's theory Swami Prabhavananda says, "Empirical existence consists of (1) the subject, the experiencer, the *jiva*, and (2) the object of experience, the world of the senses. Though the empirical world of subject and object is not separate from *Brahman* for it is *Brahman* that is evolved as the universe, yet again *Brahman* is not merely the universe of name and form—he is transcendental as well".

(Swami Prabhavananda :

The Spiritual Heritage of India, pp 299-300)

As against Sankara's theory of *maya*, Bhaskara attacks him directly and asserts that *Brahman* is not merely an illusion *Na prapancamatram Brahma.*

Of course Bhaskara emphatically says that the *mayavada* theory is an imprint of Buddhism. To quote the exact expression of Bhaskara it was described as *Mahayanikabauddha-gathitam mayavadam.* Bhaskara, says Dr. Radhakrishnan, "holds that the world of matter had real existence, though it is essentially of the same nature as *Brahman*. When matter acts on *Brahman* it seems as a limiting adjunct in the form of body and senses and results in rise of individual souls."

Dr. Radhakrishnan further adds, "He (Bhaskara) admits the reality of *upadhis* and does not trace them to *avidya*. The *jiva* is naturally one *Brahman* is due to limitations."

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Bhaskara says *Jivaparayasca svabhaviko beda anpadhikas tu bhedah*. Bhaskara connects *Jiva* and *Brahman* just like sparks and fire. This is just like Sri Ramakrishna's interpretation of *bindus* forming the *sindhu*—drops of water forming the ocean. "Through virtue and piety, we can discriminate between the two, and then we are saved."

All human beings, trees, animals everything is part of the Almighty.

Bhaskara says, "Individual souls are many, and they are parts of *Brahman*. They are related to him as are the rays of the sun to the sun. They are neither absolutely different from God, nor are they absolutely identical with him. In the state of bondage, that is, ignorance—individual souls are different from God; and the state of liberation—that is, knowledge—they become one with him. To the self, purified by spiritual discipline, is revealed the knowledge of *Brahman*, and as the self finally becomes one with *Brahman*, all consciousness of separation is dissolved. But this union is possible only after death, never at any time during life." In this respect the philosophy of Bhaskara differs from all the other systems.

Man's final goal is union with the Supreme *Brahman*. To achieve this divine goal, says Bhaskara, one has to be completely unattached to materialistic things in life. It does not mean that the universe is an illusion or human life is an illusion. It is a divine gift. It is a supreme gift of God. The best way of making use of it is to work for the final God-realisation and for that Bhaskara recommends "the ideal of being in the world and yet not of it, and the worship of *Brahman* and meditation upon Him." Bhaskara's greatest contribution is the feeling of a personal God. Dr. Radhakrishnan observes, "Bhaskara thinks that *Brahman* actually undergoes the suffering and the rebirth of the individual souls. *Karma* is according to him an essential means (*anga*) to knowledge which results in salvation. He adopts the view of Ramanuja, or more accurately, *Jnanakarma Samuccaya* or the combination of *Karma*, and *jnana*".

(*S. Radhakrishnan : Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, p 671*).

Details about the personal life of the Saint are not available.

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It is obvious that he did not concentrate on building up any organisational set up through which the messages are spread far and wide.

However, through spiritual works of other saints and other references, it is gathered that Bhaskara was the centre of saintly scholars who appeared after Sankara and before Ramanuja and the centre of his main activities of religious discourses was south India, mainly Kanchipur, one of the most flourishing head-quarters of spiritual enlightenment. It is also clear that he had drawn the attention of number of saintly scholars devoted to religious pursuits and seeking eagerly God-realisation.

Although Bhaskara opposed Sankara's theory of *maya*, illusion, it is obvious that in order to oppose his own theory of *bhedabhedavada* he explained the other version of Sankara too and thereby popularised Sankara theory by *Advaitavad*. It is true that Bhaskara's plea for a personal God is hundred per cent in line with the traditional approach of India to God. His vision was wider and liberal. The very fact that the Saint identified *Vishnu* also as *Shiva*, leaves him in the group of a *Shaivite*. To that extent, finally there should be no question of putting Sankara and Bhaskara on two different schools, opposing each other.

Whatever Sankara might have preached on *Advaitavada*, ideas grow and change. The final thought of the great saint was clear through different hymns by Sankara in praise of *Shiva*. Almost all the prayer-songs on *Shiva*, like *Dhyannityang Maheshang Rajatagirinivam Charuchandra. batangsang* or *Prabhumishamani Samasha Sagunam* or *Shivaya Shantaya Karanatraya hetavay, nivedayami chatmanang Tvam gatim Parameshwaram* sung in all temples of *Shiva* throughout India and chanted as the *mantras* in millions of homes in India and abroad, make it perfectly clear that *Shiva* was the conception of Sankara's personal deity even if he had given the *advaita* philosophy of *Vedanta*.

That is the beauty of Indian philosophy. She stands for assimilation and not dissention.

In the ultimate analysis all are one.

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As Sri Ramakrishna said about *advaita, dvaita* or *vishistadvaita, Sakar* or *Nirakar*, they hardly matter. It is just like different streamlets mingling into the mighty sea. Once a person gets enlightenment he is one with *Brahman*. That was also very much the meesage of Saint Bhaskara.

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ACHARYA NATHAMUNI

(824 AD-924 AD)

One of the greatest saints of South India, Nathamuni had a great impact in the *Vaishnava* school of thought. He was the forerunner of great *Vaishnava* pioneers like Saint Yamunacharya or Ramanujacharya. He was the grandfather of Yamunacharya or Alavandar who left his kingdom and joined monkhood only getting inspired by the spiritual sermons on Nathamuni that he heard from his trusted disciple Manakkal Nambi.

The great Alavandar's most important treatise, *Stotraratna*, gems of hymns start with a description of the grandfather.

Yamunacharya writes,

"Obeisance to the Saintly Nathamuni, who is an unfathomable ocean of divine love and a storehouse of knowledge and renunciation, unimaginable, marvellous and spontaneous."

In the second song of the same *Stotraratna*, Yamuna says :

"Obeisance to the Master, Nathamuni,
Whose feet are my eternal refuge
in this world and in the next
and whose life marks the farthest
limit in the field of man's
achievement of genuine knowledge and
love for the lotus feet of this Lord."

The original hymns are simply superb. Yamuna worships Nathamuni as a divine manifestation. Yamuna's original hymn in *Stotraratna* says :

Namo achintyad bhutaklista
Jnanabairagya rashaye

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Nathaya munaye agadha
Bhagavad bhakti sindhabay

Sri Nathamuni was the inspiration of God-realisation of Yamunacharya. He considered him the ocean of divine nectar. The second hymn in *Stotraratna* says :

Tasmoi namo madhujidanghri
Saroja tattvajnanan anuraga mahimati sayantaseemnay
Nathaya Nathamunaye atra paratra chapi
Nityang yadiyacharanau sharanam madiyam

The enlightened saint describes Nathamuni as a paragon amongst holy men. He says "Obeisance again to Nathamuni, the paragon amongst holy men, who has become the source of, and the sole authority on, the genuine traditions of *Bahkti Yoga* through his sacred precepts, which are verily the overflow from the ocean of knowledge and love of Achyuta that he himself was.

Bhuo namoaparimita achyutabhakti
Tattvajnanamritabdhi paribahashubhoirbachovih
Loke abatirna paramartha samagra bhakti
Yogaya Nathamunaye yaminarg baraya

Only after paying obeisance to Nathamuni, Yamunacharya pays homage to *Narayana*. The saint does that not because he was his grandfather only. This he did because, Nathamuni was his spiritual *guru* and the path-finder.

Nathamuni was a pioneer among *Vaishnava* saints. Yamunacharya says it is not easy to attain *Sri Vishnu* without first paying tributes to the *Guru*. He says, "Adoration of God is more blissful tasteful when done after the adoration of the blessed *Guru*, for milk, though naturally sweet, is sweeter still when sugar is added to it."

Greatest among the preceptors Acharya Nathamuni was born at Virannarayanappuram in the month of June 824 AD.

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The details of his birth are given in the hymn in his praise by the *Vaishnavas* which say :

Jyasthhay anuradha sambhutang
Viranarayananay puray
Gajabatran shamacharyamadyang
Nathamuning bhajay

I adore Acharya Nathamuni, the greatest among the preceptors, who was born at Virannarayanappuram in the month of *Jyeshtha* (June-July) under the influence of the asterism Anuradha (seventeenth stellar mansion) as an incarnation of *Gajavadana* (a courtier of *Vishvaksena*).

He was responsible for installing *Sri Ranganatha* in the beautiful temple. His original name was Ranganatha Muni. He is known as the first among the *acharyas*. He hailed from a learned and spiritually enlightened family of Virannarayanappuram.

According to most authentic source, "His father Iswar Muni was a *Pancaratrika* who was the progenitor of the celebrated family of the Tatacaryas, who has played a very important part in the religious history of South India." About the personal life of Nathamuni, it is recorded that he "was an erudite scholar in the *Vedas*, *Smritis*, and other scriptures, a *yagin* and a devotee."

Nathamuni had a photogenic memory and a keen receptive mind. "Once he heard some pilgrims address the local deity Rajagopala in a Tamil song which contained the beautiful expression *aravamuda* (inexhaustible nectar). It seemed to him that to contemplate God with the psams which contained such a word was sweeter than the realization of God by *Yoga* itself. He therefore devoted himself to the task of discovering and popularising those hymns and succeeded in rescuing the *Prabandham* from oblivion."

The greatest contribution of Nathamuni was his organising the sublime works of the earlier *Alvars*. This is a Tamil word meaning the supreme devotees of Lord Vishnu. Literal meaning of this all important word is "one who sinks or dives deep." They played an important role in the spiritual life of South

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India. "They are the eternal and ever free devotees of the Lord who once at His behest came down in human form to demonstrate, both by precept and example, the nature of true devotion to the benighted and erring mortals below." They were twelve in number.

Nathamuni, who was a Brahmin, was married and led the life of a householder. He had a son whose name was also Iswar Muni, "a man of rare beauty and brilliance." He got his son also married at an early age.

Nathamuni went to North India, to almost all the holy places with the entire family consisting of his son, wife and daughter-in-law. Iswarmuni's son was yet to be born. "Because the child had been conceived on the bank of the Yamuna near Brindaban, he was named Yamunacharya by Nathamuni who was the foremost scholar of his time."

Unfortunately immediately after the birth of the grandson Yamunacharya, his son Iswarmuni died prematurely. Nathamuni gave up the life of a household and joined monkhood. "People confirmed upon him the title 'Muni', because he used to lead a pure life as the *Munis* of yore. He was also called *Yogindra* in view of his attainment of perfection in *Yoga*."

Nathamuni did much in advance what other great Saints introduced in their respective regions and languages hundreds of years later. He compiled the works of these Masters (Alvars) in Tamil and gave the hymns the same status as other religious scriptures in Sanskrit.

His monumental achievement lies in the acceptance and popularity of "*Prabandham*". Some details about *Prabandam* are interesting. Nathamuni, the most learned man of his time, by and large, "Divided it into four parts of one thousand stanzas each, added introductory verses to each section classified the verses according to different metres, and then introduced it to be sung in the temple of *Rajagopala* in his village. The adoption of the *Prabandham* as a sacred text by the Srirangam temple, together with the celebration of it in the great *ekadashi* festival in the month of *Margasirsa*, lasting for three weeks and devoted to the chanting of the *Prabandham*, was followed, thanks to Nathamuni's efforts, by a similar custom in the prominent *Vaishnava* temples of South India. The establishment of the images of the Alvars and the conduct

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of the recitation festival soon spread throughout the *Sri-Vaishnava* world.

This was not an ordinary thing. The sanctity of the mother tongue was questioned even in the sixteenth century in Maharashtra when Eknath composed his beautiful hymns in Marathi although he himself was a Brahmin scholar of repute. The great *Bhakti* era saints, particularly Kabir, Dadu, Vallabha, Ravidas in north India composed hymns in Hindi. In the fifteenth century Narsi Mehta gave immortal hymns in Gujarati. In the fifteenth century Guru Nanakji and his supporters gave immortal hymns in Gurumukhi or Punjabi. Baba Farid composed hymns before that in the local dialect, that was in Punjabi. Great Saint bards like Purandaradasa gave hymns in Kannada in the fifteenth century. The few hundred immortal songs in praise of *Ma Kali*, just like hymns, now sung in hundreds of temples throughout Bengal were given in Bengali by Ramaprasad only in the seventeenth century.

Centuries before any of the Indian Saints offered their songs, hymns, or *abhangas* regularly in the holy temples, with great boldness, tireless efforts and learned compilation and editing Nathamuni took up the task and made the *Alvars* immortal. This was definitely a step forward for mass consciousness and development of God-realisation among the ordinary people and the devoted learned too.

Nathamuni, while presenting the works of the twelve *Alvars* gave their backgrounds. They were from all parts of Tamil Nadu. There was no restriction of caste, creed or even sex One of the most illustrious alvars was a lady saint *Andal*, who was born at Srivilliputtur where a beautiful temple was erected in her honour.

Tiruppan Alvar, for instance, hailed from a weaker community. It is said Nammalvar was the greatest among them. He was a *Vellala*. Even of almost equal status Tirumangai Alvar was a *Kalla* by caste. Tirumalisai, it is observed, "was a person of dubious parentage and of the Brahmanical Alvars, one at least was a repentant sinner."

The exact dates of the *Alvars*' birth and death are not known. The dates whatever available through the hymns in their honour are only traditional rather than historical. Swami Ramakrishnananda, an enlightened disciple of Sri Ramakrishna

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Paramahansa and the founder of Ramakrishna Math at Madras had done some research on these Alvars. The learned Saint tells us "The traditional dates of the birth of Alvars as given in Sanskrit couplets are to all intents and purposes indefinite, incomplete and unreliable, and neither scholars nor historians have satisfactorily ascertained those dates beyond all dispute." Under the circumstances, Pandit M. Raghava Iyengar after careful research and scrutiny of available material has fixed in his book *Alvarkal Kala-Nilai* the dates in the case of seven Alvars with considerable perspicacity. Hence his considered opinion is given below. The opinion of Sri Manavala Mamuni, as given in his verse, represents the traditionally accepted view regarding the chronological order which coincides more or less with the historical view and appears to be highly probable. There is no mention of Andal and Madhura Kavi in the recorded list, since it is well known that Andal was the foster daughter of Perialvar and Madhura Kavi Alvar took refuge in Nammalvar as his *Guru*.

So, all the Alvars belong to earlier period. The first three Alvars—Poigai, Bhuta and Pey—between the 5th and 6th century A.D. Tirumazhisai Alvar—the beginning of the 7th century A.D.

Perialvar—the first half of the 8th century A.D.

Andal—born 716 AD, sang Tiruppavai 731 A D.; and lived for a few years more.

Tirumangai Alvar (the latest) 8th century A.D.

The chronological order of the appearance of the Alvars according to Sri Manavala Mamuni, a great *Acharya* of the *Srivaishnavas*, is as follows : Poigai, Bhuta, Pey, Tirumazhisai, Nammalvar, Kula Sekhara, Perialvar, Tondaradippodi Alvar, Tiruppanalvar and Tirumangai Alvar.

All these great holy men were worshippers of *Sri Vishnu*, popular here as *Sri Ranganatha*. The image of *Sri Ranganatha*, as the tradition goes according to *Sri Vaishnavas* was the family deity of the Ikshvaku line of kings who were rulers of Ayodhya. Sri Ramachandra hailed from this family. Sri Ram gave the

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deity to Bibhisana, brother of Ravana who sided with Sri Ram. Bibhisana was taking it to his own country Sri Lanka. As he was carrying it there was a vision to install it at Srirangam. That was immediately carried out. A huge temple was erected. Bibhisana was a great devotee of the Lord. He visited the holy place once in every twelve years.

For the followers of *Sri Vaishnava* order this is the highest pilgrimage. The deity is a lively one. There are many anecdotes associated with the temple where the deity took direct action against any injustice or torture to any of His devotees. Once when one of the Alvars was stoned by a priest for obstructing the way—where he was lying in deep divine ecstasy—the priest had thrown a stone at him because the Alvar was an untouchable. All the gates were closed from inside and never opened till the priest pleaded guilty.

Giving some details about the twelve *Alvars* a learned scholar observes, "The first four *Alvars* are believed to have flourished in the land of the *Pallavas* and the last three in that of the *Cholas*. The seventh hailed from Kerala and the rest from the Pandya country. They came from different strata of the society. Only the eighth of the above list is stated to have been a *Brahmana*, although some regard him as a *pariah*. The fifth was a *Vellala* by caste and while the seventh was a king, the twelfth came from a *kalla* family, that is a family of robbers."

This cosmopolitan character of the *Alvars* had definitely been reflected in the *Prabandham*. There was no binding on anybody on caste or creed. It was a new experiment by so many mystic saints who had not organised themselves into any sect or school. They were mad after God-realisation and did not care for anything else. They were all incarnations of humility. The whole thing—one of the richest aspects of Indian philosophy and culture—would just have been lost to us but for Nathamuni who painstakingly preserved them all. These *Alvars* were like mystic Bauls of Bengal, mystic minstrels who sang to the glory of God. They behaved in an abnormally thrilling fashion. They would sometimes dance, sometimes laugh, sometimes cry. They were completely indifferent to the environments around. "God-absorbed and God-enamoured, they wandered from place to place, addressing psalms to the

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manifestations of *Vishnu* in the different villages of the Tamil land. The first three Alvars were Poygai, Bhuta and Pey. They were described by local people as "Spirits and mad beings."

The fourth Alvar was a great *Yogin* of high spiritual attainment. He was known for his devotion. Saint Tirumalisai wrote *Nanmukham Tiruvandadi* and *Tirucandaviruttam* which are sincere hymns in praise of *Sri Vishnu*.

The fifth *Alvar* was known by different descriptions—Maran, Nammalvar, Vakulabharanar. He was considered as "the greatest of the *Vaishnava* saints." He is considered as the author of the areat spiritual treatises considered by *Vaishnavas* as "the four *Vedas* in the Tamil garb," It was his loyal disciple Madhura Kavi who popularised his hyms. They were Tiruviruttam, the *Tiruvasiriyam*, the *Periya Tiru Vandadi* and the *Tiruvaimoli*.

Nammalvar had a great impact among the *Vaishnavas* in South India.

These hymns, besides their literary grandeur had deep spiritual attractions which could immediately touch the heart of any devotee. It is observed that "Nammalvar's hymns have shaped the conduct and faith of the southern *Vaishnavas*. Possessing a matchless cadence and simple grandeur, they are characterised equally by their literary charm and by their ethical and spiritual values. To the emotionally inclined, the psalms are simple and appealing prayers to the different local *arcavataras* of *Vishnu*. To the less emotional and more philosophical, they seem to be the outcome of great learning in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Vedanta*, the *Geeta* and the *Bhagavata* literature. To the practical spiritualist, they are of value as the achievement of one who was in holy communion with God."

Nammalvar had been highly regarded by the later saints. He is known as *kutastha*. It is said that "the fundamental doctrines of the *Sri Vaishnav* faith, as current today were taught by him."

Madhura Kavi, also considered an *alvar* gave an immortal message which says that "devotion to a teacher and devotion to God are equal."

Among the *alvars* was also a king. He was Kulasekhara. He was the king of Travancore. He left his kingdom and spent his days at the temple of Srirangam in self-imposed poverty.

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The next *Alvar*, popularly known as Vishnuchitta or Periyalvar brought the Pandyan king to the *Vaishnava* thoughts. He used to have occasional visions. He had an adopted daughter whose name is equally important and well known. She was Andal. She is considered as the incarnation of *Lakshmi*. She refused to marry any human being. She accepted *Sri Vishnu* as her consort. Like Meerabai, it is said, she got mingled with image of *Sri Ranganatha* at Srirangam.

Tiruppanar who hailed from a *pariah* background became an *alvar* by mere personal spiritual attainment. The chief priest of the temple of Srirangam had been ordered by *Sri Vishnu* to take the wandering bard to the innermost part of the temple.

The last of the alvars was Tirumangai Mannan, a Vellala; an expert in military strategy, turning to mysticism. His wife was from a *Vaishnava* family of repute. He built the Srirangam temple. His works are highly ranked among *Sri Vishnu Upasakas*. If the works of Nammalvar are regarded as the four *Vedas*, the works of Tirumangai are considered as six *Vedangas*.

Nathamuni compiled the works of the twelve Alvars and brought them out under the title *Nalayira Prabandham*. As the Marathi saints composed *abhangas*, the Tamil saints composed *nalayiram*. Both mean the same thing—verses in praise of God. There are four thousand verses in *Nalayira Prabandham*. Nathamuni divided them in four distinct parts. This was a unique contribution by Nathamuni to God realisation. It was the expression of inner realisation of at least 12 saints.

Mudal ayiram consists of "the utterances of various saints as Perialvar and the lady saint Andal. This is the first volume.

The second volume known as *Periatirumoyi* consists of the works of *Tirumangai*.

The third volume is perhaps the most important and popular among the four. This is known as *Tiruvaymoyi* of Nammalvar.

The last volume entitled *Iyarpa* is "a miscellany like the first. Nammalvar's Tiruvamoyi is said to be the Tamil adaptation of the *Vedas*.

Nathamuni says of *Tiruvaymoyi* :

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Sahasra sakhopani sat samagamam . . . ravida Veda Sagaram. It is described as *Dravida Veda.*

Tiruvamoyi. as noted by Dr. Radhakrishnan, "has for its central purpose the elucidation of the five topics (*artha panchakam*) of the absolute reality, the individual soul, its relation to the Supreme, the destruction of the undesirable and the realisation of the desirable."

(*Indian Philosophy, op cit.* footnote, p. 668)

Because of the acceptance of *Prabandham* in Tamil at par with Sanskrit holy scriptures the sacred literature of the *Vaishnavas* is popularly described as *Ubhaya Vedanta* consisting of Sanskrit *Prasthanatraya* and Tamil *Prabandham.* Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says, "The tradition has long been current that the hymns of the Alvars were in agreement with the *Vedic* scriptures. The uncompromising *Advaitism* of Sankara made it necessary for Ramanuja to reiterate the theistic view of the *Vedas.*"

These *Prabandham* had been popularised further by the later Acharyas like Yamunacharya and Ramanujacharya. They had cut both ways. These *Prabandham* in their language version had helped the *Acharyas* also to carry out their divine message among the masses in an easier way. They being in their mother tongue, were more easily accessible to the ordinary common men. As the *Acharyas* helped to preserve them for posterity, they too served these holy men as vehicles of their thought to reach the masses.

It looks sometimes so strange when one ponders over the whole matter that step by step all the arrangements for Saints are predestined and pre-arranged. They look so genuinely spontaneous. The events are so evenly arranged to lead the next saint to take up the task as is so common in a relay race.

"By giving the *Prabandham* the status of the *Vedas* in the temple festival, Nathamuni proved that the holiness of the works written in Tamil was not in any way inferior to that of the works written in Sanskrit. One immediate and momentous result of the great reform was the rise of a new and extensive type of the religious literature In South India, half Sanskrit and half Tamil, the object of which was to expound the *Tamil Veda* and reconcile its teachings with those of the *prasthana-traya.*

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The Prabandham, again, came to be like the *Vedas*, an essential part of a *Sri Vaishnava's* education."

Doubtless to say it was a great popular movement. Indeed it paved the way for the masses to go deep into spiritual pursuits. They could at least understand the language and try to realise its significance and inner meaning. Just like Eknath or Namadeva in Maharashtra or Narsi Mehta in Gujarat much later—at least four or five hundred years later—also followed this experiment unconsciously. Baba Farid gave divine nectar in Punjabi for all lettered and unlettered admirers, as Guru Nanakji did later. Their spontaneous divine songs led millions to God-realisation. But this had one common limitation. That was the restriction of these eternal messages only to their respective regions. In Sanskrit it would have been spread all over the country. It will be an excellent idea to get them compiled in English and present this rich spiritual secret treasure of India to the thirsty suffering bewildered world.

These *Prabandhams* had to be studied with great care. There were certain expressions which needed backgroud stories and connecting anecdotes. The devotees had been accustomed only to the ancient scriptures. This needed co-ordination and to avoid confusion and dispute it was decided to assign authority to some particular pontiff. A new leadership system was introduced known as the *Acharya*. The spiritual leader had been given the authority to give direction, guidelines, interpretations to devotional problems to both mendicants and householders. His decision was to be accepted as final.

The pontify was ex-officio chief of the Trust of the Srirangam Temple which was the headquarters and central point of the *Sri Vaishnava* movement. This was to be followed to other temples which were given affiliations. This was a great step forward in propagating and preserving the faith in *Sri Vishnu*. This introduction of *Acharyaship* shows the great administrative ability and farsight of Nathamuni. It was responsible for creating a team of spiritual devoted mendicants to carry the message of Sri Vishnu. This shows his equal skill as an organiser, They could stand against schools of scholars and Sannyasins who would try to let them down or stand against the propagation of faith or fight against their ideology.

Needless to say that Nathamuni was requested to head the

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Chair for his deep learning. spiritual attainment and great organising ability. It was the beginning of a great movement in a disciplined manner It made the spiritual task of the succeeding path finders like Yamunacharya and Ramanujacharya easier. The foundation stone was laid by the new first Acharya. They had to build up the mighty edifice. "The whole *Vaishnava* world paid him allegiance. With him *Sri Vaishnavism* commenced a new era ofa ctivity and expansion. Scholar and thinker, he composed two well known works—the *Yogarahasya*, which has been lost except in regard to stray passages quoted by the later Vedanta Desika, and the *Nyayatattva* which was the first *Visistadvaita* work in the *Acharyic* age. Probably the doctrine of self surrender, the most important dogma of *Sri-Vaishnavism*, was first authoritatively enunciated by him."

The contribution of Nathamuni was indeed a landmark in the realm of spirituality in India. No doubt glowing tributes have been paid to his great genius both as a spiritual leader and an organiser. The *Cultural Heritage of India* records with gratitude, "The next (next to Alvars etc) great landmark in the history of Tamil Vaishnavism in the rise of a school of philosophers known as *Acharyas*, Nathamuni, the first of these, flourished about the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century A.D. He organised the *Sri-Vaishnavas* and popularised the cult among the masses by collecting the songs of the *Alvars*, setting them to Dravidian music, and having them regularly sung in the temples. But he was also a great theologian and his school took up the task of giving a philosophical background to the *Vaishnava* theories and creeds. Nathamuni was followed by three *Acharyas*, of whom the last, his grandson Yamunacharya, was a great scholar."

(*Thc Cultural Heritage of India*,
Vol. IV, p. 54)

Nathamuni had a large number of followers and many trusted dedicated disciples. The chief among them was Manakkal Nambi who took leadership of the movement but passed it on to Yamunacharya, then King Alavandar, whom he persuaded to renounce the kingdom and join monkhood. Manakkal passed this spiritual leadership voluntarily as a gesture to his Guru Nathamuni.

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It is indeed a sad thing that no study in depth or research has been conducted on Nathamuni, the father of a pioneering *Sri Vaishnava* movement throughout India. Whatever has been available is insufficient, mostly wrong statements, even by saintly scholars, in a casual manner.

In his masterly treatment on *Indian Philosophy* in two big volumes, even Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan has not given any details about this great pioneer. He only casually mentions Nathamuni's name in the long chapter on Ramanuja. He only mentions, "The chief of the teachers who preceded Ramanuja are Nathamuni and Alavandar or Yamunacharya. Nathamuni (tenth century) a disciple of the last of the *Alvars*, is said to have arranged the hymns of the Alvars. *Nyayatattva* and *Yogarahasya* are attributed to him."

(S. Radhakrishnan : *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II p. 668)

Even a roving Saint like Swami Prabhavanada in his learned lectures on Yamunacharya just mentioned Nathamuni as an Alvar. He writes, "one of the *Alvars* was Nathamuni, grandfather of Yamuna. He was known to history as a great, saint living in the early part of the tenth century."

(*Spiritual Heritage of India*, p. 301)

This is perhaps a slip of pen. Nathamuni's name does not occur in the list of twelve *Alvars*. Dr. Radhakrishnan, of course says, he was initiated by the last *Alvar*. In an authentic volume of more than 800 pages on Indian culture, *The Gazetteer of Indian* does not care even to mention either the name of Nathamuni or Yamunacharya although many minor monks are referred to.

(*Gazetteer of India*, Vol. III)

Nathamuni had a great impact on whole of *Sri Vaishnava* school of thought. The immediate influence was felt by the two great Acharyas, Yamunacharya and Ramanujacharya.

Yamuna's whole career was changed. Yamuna was ruling Pandya Kingdom as Alavandar. He was a successful ruler. He

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had complete control and grip over the neighbourhood where all the chieftains and minor feudal lords were quite afraid of him. He was an equally respected ruler.

Nathamuni had an eye on his grandson only from a distance. He never went near his royal court to give any guideline or show any authority although he could because when Alavandar sat on the throne he was a mere minor. His rennciation was forceful and final. He was an enlightened soul away from material gain, name, fame or prosperity.

He noticed Yamuna for twently three years and directed his most loyal and trusted disciple Manakkal Nambi to see that Yamuna does not "waste" all his life only as a ruler. The loyal disciple kept his promise and dissuaded the king from lust and luxuries of life only through the lofty thoughts composed in hymns by Nathamuni and a series of lectures on *Srimad Bhagawat Geeta* on way to the temple of *Sri Ranganath*. Alavandar was so much influenced by the lofty teachings and strong moral character and ethical values of his grandfather that it was not at all difficult for him to renounce everything at the call of spiritual pursuit. The whole thing was pre-planned by his great saintly grandfather Nathamuni. The greatest sage and savant Ramanujacharya drew his main inspiration from Nathamuni as much as he drew from his unseen spiritual pathfinder Yamunacharya. Before taking up the assignment of Acharyaship he thoroughly prepared himself by studying the complete works of Nathamuni for whom he always had the highest esteem.

Ramanujacharya, along with his disciples visited Viranna-rayarappuram, birthplace of Nathamuni and paid his obeisance even to the dust of the holy land.

Swami Prajnananda Saraswati, a great *Vedantist* and founder of the Shankar Math of Barisal has written in the *History of Vedanta Philosophy* (in Bengali) about Nathamuni "From the tenth century AD the stream of *Visishtadvaitism* started flowing strongly and very soon turned into a flood. *Mahapurush Sri Nathamuni* was the main hero of this new spiritual movement. About 908 AD this movement started. The fruits started reaching all by the time Yamunacharya took the leadership. It reached the climax at the hands of Ramanuja. Through his effortless spiritual pursuit and

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limitless capacity, the movement reached its peak. The flood that had its birth in the heart of Nathamuni swelled into a mighty deluge throughout India."

(from Bengali original)

The great *Vaishnava Acharya* Venkatanath has recorded about Nathamuni in his *Sankalpa Suryodaya* that the destroyer of all darkness of ignorance was Nathamuni. He was the pioneer of the movement. This was further developed by Yamunacharya. It had fully spread and sprouted under the spiritual guidance of Ramanujacharya.

In his *The Philosophy of Visishtadvaita* C.N. Srinivasachari, it has been stressed that Nathamuni's *Nyayatattva* was the first treaties on *Visishtadvaita* system. Unfortunately the book has been lost. Only some quotations are available here and there particularly in the works by the *Vishishtadvaita* scholars.

Ramanuja quoted extensively from *Stotraratna*. It is recorded that "In the formulation of his view Ramanuja was greatly influenced by Nathamuni and the writings of the *Alvars*. The doctrine of *bhakti* preached in the *Pancharatna* and in the writings of the *Alvars* and of Yamuna, found its philosophical expression in the writings of Ramanuja."

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SAINT GORAKHNATH

(*Circa* 900 AD)

One of the great Saints of Northern India, a follower of the *Shiva* cult, worshipped by thousands as an incarnation of *Shiva*, Gorakhnath was born in the sacred soil of Kamrup in Assam in the tenth century AD. Some scholars like Griarson, Briggs however, after some research, concluded that Gorakhnath hailed from the Punjab. Still a third school of thought advance a theory that the saint hailed from Peshawar. The last theory is advanced by Dr. Man Mohan Singh who has written a treatise on Gorakh Nath.

Quite a mumber of scholars have devoted their attention to get details of the Saint's earlier life. All give different versions. All propound their theories only on traditions. The very fact that all these regions of India are well versed with his spiritual works and messages and have traditional stories centring round his works more than amply show the deep imprint the saint had left on them all. Each have sayings on him, so much so that each has made Saint his own dear one.

There are innumerable *dohans* in circulation in the name of Gorakhnath.

There are two likely probabilities about him which may be accepted as authentic.

The first is about his birth place. A popular *dohan*, couplet in Hindi originally composed by the Saint says:

Purab desh panchhahea ghati
(*Janam*) *likhya hamera yogan*
Guru hamara Naogar kohiya
Metoi bharam birodh

My native land is the Eastern Zone. My field of activity is the Western Zones. Right from birth it is written on my lot to

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practise *yoga*. My Guru, the propellor of the boat always corrects my mistakes.

These indicate clearly that Gorakhnath hailed from Kamrup, a centre of *yogis*, the sacred land of *Tantrik yogis*.

To Saint Gorakhnath goes the credit of modern Hindi prose pioneership. Dr. Mohan Singh firmly believes that for this very reason it is wrong to hold that Gorakhnath hailed from the east.

Dr. Sukumar Sen, a great scholar on history of Bengali language and literature however asserts firmly that Gorakhnath and the *Natha* cult were nurtured and got flourished in Bengal and the neighbourhood areas. There are the *yugi* castes prevalent in Bengal even today carrying the banner of *Gorakh panthis*. May be the saint was not born in Bengal or Assam but certainly he was not born in Punjab. A fourth theory may be submitted about the Saint's emergence from Uttar Pradesh. The sacred city of Gorakhpur that carries his name may be a possible hint of his origin in this area. It is situated also near Nepal. The large number of disciples that he had in Nepal where he flourished at the Holy Temple of Pashupatinath is quite near the town. The accents of the language used by the saint in his *dohans* have also great similarities to *Purabia* style, The word *purab* used by the Saint himself indicates too that he must have hailed from either Uttar Pradesh or Bihar. In this case, the language being more with *purab* accent rather than *bhojpuri* seems to support the view that Gorakhnath hailed from Gorakhpur itself.

Gorakhnath was born in a very poor family wherever it might have been. The mother was a pious lady without any issue for a long time. She would never take any food without offering any prayers to *Shiva*.

After the day's hard work, the devoted lady used to sit long in meditation. After long hours she would retire only after repeating the daily prayer. She wanted to have a deeply pious son, a pure soul, who could sanctify the fourteen generations. One night, as she was deeply absorbed in divine thoughts, counting the rosaries, the whole room suddenly got flooded with soft blue light. Out of that appeared a beautiful figure of *Shiva*. The Lord appeared before the devotee and said," I am

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delighted with your prayers. Your wish will difinitely be fulfilled."

The lady said in ecstasy, "Then good Lord, bless me with a son. I have no other earthly desire."

Said Lord Shiva, "That is granted. You will be the proud mother of a saintly child. Look after him well.

The child was born with all the good signs of a *yogin*.

The pious mother was the actual first *guru*. The child would be made to sit for prayers along with the mother regularly. She would guide the young one to taste the bliss of God-realisation. She was the only one who knew the background of the child's past, and possibly also the future.

They were so poor that the little one was to help the mother to sell cow dung cakes in the market for fuel. Days passed happily, inspite of grim poverty. The child was hardly twelve when suddenly a *yogin* appeared before the hut of the poor woman. A huge crowd was following him. The mendicant steadily walked before the child and paid in traditional obeisance as an incarnation of *Shiva*. The whole village crowd was stunned.

Next day the child left the house without telling anybody about his programme.

The young boy somehow felt that his only task was to realise God and spread the message of the Lord to the world.

He did not know where to proceed. He did not know anything about the unseen *Guru*.

The child's thirst for knowledge was keen. He had studied *Koula jnan Nirnaya* by Koula Abadhut Matsyendranath. He was much impressed by the treatise. But he had no idea about his physical identity.

The child *yogin* entered the forest and sat in deep meditation of *Asutosh*, the kind one who is satisfied with the least of prayers.

The young saint had a vision. He saw his *Guru*, his *ashram* and the *Pashupatinath* clearly before him. He started his journey. According to the popular traditions of Nepal the presence of Gorakhnath's *Guru* Matsyendranath was right at the end of the eighth century. *Basbali Parbatia* records a

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meeting between Matsyendranath and king Baradewa. This Baradeva ruled till the middle of the eighth century. According to Wright's *History of Nepal*, this dynasty ruled from 635 AD to to 751. Gorakhnath reached Nepal when Baradeva's father Narendra Deva was the ruler. That was only during the middle of the eighth century.

Briggs tells us, "Until further dates are discovered, conclusion must be that Gorakhnath lived not later than 1200, probably early in the seventh century, and that he came originally from Eastern Bengal".

(Briggs : *Gorakhnath and Kanfather yogins*, p. 250)

Sudhayogsini Mainimati, Queen of East Bengal, was a disciple of Gorakhnath. Her son was also an enlightened soul who left the kingdom and took to ascetism. His name was Gopi Chand. It seems the mother inspired the royal son to embrace ascetism. The *sannyas* is a subject of many literary masterpieces in Bengali literature. The king was immoralised by litterateurs in Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Oriya. There are full length plays centring round his *yogic* life. His kingdom was from Vikrampur to Tripura.

Bappa Rao was a chieftain of Rajasthan then known as Rajputana. He was in power in the eighth century AD. According to tradition popular in the area, Bappa Rao begged the Saint of his mercy and bit of miraculous power. Gorakhnath was kind to him and gave him a double edged dagger which always brought luck to him in the battlefied. With the help of this miraculous power and the dagger, Bappa Rao captured the throne of Mewar. His rule started in the beginning of the eighth century. So, according to the tradition, the Saint flourished much earlier.

Similarly, traditions in Bengal have tendency to believe that the Saint was showering his blessings in Bengal during the Pal regime. By all historical evidence, the last of the Pals sat on the throne by the end of eleventh century. Poet Manik Chand, a contemporary brilliant poet, composed many songs in praise of Gorakhnath and other yogis, in which the hero was Gorakhnath. Gorakhnath was respected by all as an incarnation of *Shiva*. Another literary treatise *Dharmamangal* mentions Mina

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Nath, Gorakhnath, Hadipa and Kanupa as the most powerful *yogis* of the Natha cult.

Different legends give different dates about the Saint. In the Punjab quite a number of eminent persons became his disciples. Among them were Goga, Puranbhagat, Ranjha and Rasalu, about whom many stories are prevalent. Now from all accounts these spiritual individuals flourished in Punjab from eighth to eleventh century. So, it is presumed by scholars in Punjab that, most probably, he was in the Punjab during this period.

Bhartrihari was one of the eminent disciples of the Saint. He is a historic figure. He was a king, an elder brother of king Vikramaditya. So, taking that point into consideration, the Saint must have flourished during the tenth century.

Sant Kabir and Guru Nanak mention about Gorakhnath in their numerous compositions. So, by that time too the influence of the saint was very much prevalent.

The very fact that there are discussions, rather conversations between the Saint with Nanak and Kabir in *Gorakhnath ki Gosthi* does not prove that he was contemporary of the later two saints. Nanak and Kabir came on the arena much later. Gorakhnath preceeded both of them by at least three or four centuries. It is not clearly known whether Matsyendranath was a Bengali. But there are reasons to believe that he was. The *charyapadas* in old Bengali style were proofs of the language prevalent in Nepal. Pandit Haraprasad Sastri has discovered *Chanyacharya Vinischaya*, which shows the existence of Bengali poems, on Buddhism popular in some parts of Nepal. Similarly one Munidatta who flourished round about 1400 AD in his commentary on *charyagitikosh*, quotes a song by Mina Natha in old Bangali. This Mina Natha was none but Matsyendra. He was also known as Machchagna Natha. *The Cultural Heritage of India* tells us, "Mina Natha was known also as Matsoendra Nath or Mochchaghna Natha. Matsyendra is apparently a synonym of Mina Natha and the addition of Natha is a tautology. Machchaghna (*Matsyaghna*, fish killer) was probably based on the supposed caste of the *Siddha*. In non-Bengali tradition, Goraksa Natha, too, is called a fisherman (*Keoteya*, i.e. Kaivarta). The derivative meaning of the name

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Jalandhari (or Jalandhara), namely net-holder, is to be remembered in this connection".

That brings more credit to the Saint. He could give a spiritual lead to those who were neglected and deprived of religious participations for ages.

The Saint was very popular in Nepal, Tibet, Bengal and other eastern and north-eastern India. "In Nepal, Tibet, and Bengal Matsyendra Natha was assimilated to the Buddhist deity, Budhisattva Avalokitesvara. His annual car festival in Nepal is as notable an event as that of Jagannatha in Orissa. Among the lower classes of Bengali Muslims, Matsyendra turned into a *Pir* called Machandali or Mochara. Perhaps derived from Mochandra, in which form the name occurs in *Goraksha Vijaya* and Goraksha Natha became the protecting deity af the milch cow, from the etymological meaning of the name and his identiy with *Shiva*, whose cattle association, e.g. the bull vehicle, is well known."

(*Cultural Heritage of India*,
Vol IV, *p. 286*)

It is further recorded that "The story of the spiritual awakening of Mina Natha by Goraksha (*Minachaitanya*, as it is sometimes called in Middle Bengali literature; the other name of the story, *Goraksha Vijaya*, lays emphasis on the achievement of Goraksha, indicates the conflict as well as the reaproachment of the cults of Goraksha and Mina Natha."

In Bengal, the faithful *Nath* ones got mixed up with similar *yogic* and *Tantric* cults which did not strictly forbid contact with women. The combined cult formed the *Nath* cult in Bengal. "The Goraksha Pantha outside Bengal presents a much purer form of the celibate *yogic* faith but even these rules of celibacy or continence are occasionally transgressed."

Matsyendranath was a great Saint. He was a worshipper of *Shiva*. He was most respected in Northern India and Nepal. In the holy Temple of *Pashupatinath* the devotees were worship ping the Lord. That was a special *Shivachaturdashi* day. It was one of the most auspicious days for the *Shaivites*.

Suddenly saint Matsyendranath had a vision. He saw before him a young handsome *yogin*, semi-naked, ash-dyed

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body with bright eyes standing before him and asking for his blessings.

How was it that the figure suddenly vanished? It seemed to be a very familiar face. Where did he see him earlier?

An enlightened soul that Matsyendranath was, he used to have divine messages from time to time.

Now suddenly he had a similar divine message asking him to be ready to welcome the new-comer who was madly searching him in the dense jungles. He was trekking a long distance on tired foot struggling with distance, hunger and fatigue. Matsyendra did not know what to do. How to get this young man?

"He is my devotee. You have to take charge of the *yogin*. He is going to carry your mission and message far and wide."

Matsyendranath left the temple in a hurry for his *ashram*. He was not to delay so that the new stranger did not return from *ashram*, disappointed.

He was not late. Nobody had come so far. The Saint asked all his followers to look for a newcomer who was looking for him.

In a few moments the followers discovered the young *yogin* and led him to the Saint. What a fascinating figure: With a tuft of hair clustering around the shining shoulder the young saint was wearing a garland of *rudraksha* around his neck, just a scanty garment on the body and a *trishul* in hand—all the signs of a mendicant devoted to *Shiva*.

Matsyendranath forgot to ask him to take his seat. He was wonderstruck with the similarity of the face he had just seen in his vision and the *yogin* standing before him in person.

A similar happiness was perceived in the face of the young mendicant. Obviously he was delighted to have met the man of his choice. He was thrilled to have met the spiritual path-finder. He simply fell at his feet.

"Sir, with great difficulties I have succeeded in meeting you, I have been trying to locate you for days and months. Only luck has brought me here. I wanted to worship the Lord in the *Pashupati* Temple on *Shivachaturdashi* day and must be blessed by you on this very day."

Matsyendranath had already been directed to undertake the task. But he wanted some details about the newcomer.

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How could he know about him? Who directed him here?

"Of all persons, my dear son, how have you selected me? Who asked you to approach me? I still wonder."

The visitor explained he heard a voice in a vision. He was guided there also by an unseen hand. It was an intuition only that brought him at his feet. He repeated his request for initiation.

The determined voice, the keen eyes, the beaming face attracted the enlightened saint. He glanced through the young *yogin* head to foot once more. He could foresee the vast possibility of the young man. He remembered the divine message about the promising *yogin* who was destined to carry out the mission of the Master.

"You have to carry out a great task, a big promise to keep and a long distance to trek. I must tell you frankly, only today I had a divine message about your arrival. You are bound to succeed in your mission. The most auspicious moment of your life is arriving in a few moments. Better finish your bath in the sacred river Bhogmati. I have already decided to initiate you to *Shivamantra* today itself.

The *guru* initiated him next moment, after giving him the safforn dress—symbol of supreme renunciation. He gave him a new name *Goraksh Nath*. *Goraknath* became a household name in no times.

It has been observed by an emiment writer that for hundreds of years these melodious songs on the *sannyas* of a young royal *yogin* has made millions of peopel tearful. These songs have been collected and in the introduction of the eminent well known scholar, Dr. Bhattasali, writes, "There is hardly any parallel to Govindachandra's renunciation. The fortunate young king left all earthly comforts, wealth and enjoyment for only God-realisation. In whole of India only once, before and after Gopichand did it happen." Before Gopichand it was only Buddha and after Mahaprabhu Chaitanya. A third name which perhaps escaped his notice was the name of Mahavir and the fourth name that might be added was of Bhartrihari. But perhaps none had left their kingdom at the young age of the eighteen! Buddha, Mahavir, Bhartrihari, Chaitanya had left their kingdom and prosperous profession respectively on their own. In this case the royal enlightened mother inspired the

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son to embrace *sannyas*. The subject has been the theme of excellent literary composition in many regional languages in Bengal, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

Mainamati, the mother of the royal saint, was the princess of Tripura. Her father was king Tilak Chandra. He had already been knowing about the spiritual power of Goraknath, the ruling saint of south and eastern contemporary India.

So when Gorakhnath paid a visit to Tripura, the Saint was given a really royal reception. Princess Mainamati was only a young girl the moment she touched the Saint's feet. The saint was stunned at her signs of spiritual attainment. He, on his own, took the initiative and to initiate her to *Shaivism*. He wanted to teach her *Yogasadhana*, too.

The king was happy but he was equally surprised. How could such a young child follow the difficult path of *Yogasadhana*? The *Nathpanthis* belived in austere spiritual pursuits.

The learned Saint could understand the royal apprehension and tried to impress upon the king that the child had been an enlightened soul in her previous birth and had all the possibilities and potentialities of a spiritual leader herself.

The king was convinced. Mainamati was initiated finally by saint Gorakhnath. The child was also named *Mainamati* by the Saint. It seemed the whole thing happened like scenes for a stage. It was dramatic. Immediately after initiation Saint Goraknnath left the royal palace.

In due course Mainamati was married to the king of Bengal, Manikchandra. Gopichand—whose original name was Govinda Chandra was the son of this illustrious king.

Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen, in his *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, says that "the name of the grand-father of the royal saint was Subarna Chandra. We find the name of Subarna Chandra in the copperplates. We also find the name of Trailakya Chandra. We find both the names in some of the popular songs on Gopichand. The golden *Virhara* of Nabadwip was the creation of Sri Chandra Deva, the royal ancestor of Gopichandra and Manik Chandra."

Manikchandra succeded the throne of Tripura by marital connection. His father was the ruler of Vikrampur. The capital was at Patika. The adjacent hills are even now known after Mainamati.

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Mainamati cherished to get her husband also initiated by Guru Gorakhnath. But he was far away from Tripura. So Mainamati herself wanted to teach him the *yogasadhana* by which one could get rid of old age, diseases or ailments. Raja Manikchandra was a happy and powerful king. His ego was touched. He refused to get initiation by his wife and unfortunately died prematurely. Gopichand was yet to be born. The poor posthumous prince was brought up by the able saintly mother. In due course he was married too. But at eighteen, at the direction of the mother, Gopichand embraced *Sannyas*, as directed by Saint Gorakhnath.

Why was it that the mother insisted on her son's *sannyas*?

Guru Gorakhnath had blessed the son and told Mainamati that an enlightened son would be born to her who must be dedicated to the Lord at the age of eighteen.

Jalandari, better known as Hadipa, was a saint of *Natha* cult. Mainamati, in strict accordance with the wish of her *Guru* Gorakhnath, got Govindachand or Gopinath initiated by Hadipa.

Hadipa hailed from very low caste and Gopinath hesitated to get initiated by him.

A miracle happened. Suddenly *Guru* Gorakhnath appeared before both of them. Gorakhnath convinced the ruling prince that he was to lead the life of a *sannyasi*, a mendicant for twelve years only. After that he was to return to his kingdom and rule. That was the only way to save his life which was to end at eighteen.

After spending a mendicant's life for twelve years Gopichand returned to his kingdom. That day also the *Guru* appeared again suddenly. He blessed the king but asked him to be cautious about his spiritual life. Gopichand ruled for some time but preferred to join the monastic order. He took the shelter finally at the feet of Gorakhnath.

Bhartrihari was another illustrious disciple of Gorakhnath. He was a king before joining the *sannyas*. It seems he first came in touch with saint Gorakhnath when he had gone to a forest on hunting. A deer was killed. It was a pet animal of the saint who protested against the king's brutal hobby. At the king's

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request the dead deer was given back its life. But the saint explained that the animal was a disciple in its previous birth but had to be born again because of its *karma*. Now that it was over it would return to its heavenly abode. Then the animal died in their presence. The king was attracted by the Saint's miraculous power and wanted to have his spiritual protection. The saint promised him to give initiation, after watching him for some time.

Again he came to the forest on hunting. On way he saw a lady jumping on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. When on return he told the queen—Pingala—about the incident she also promised to die along with him. To test her words the king sent a communication to the royal palace about his fake death. The king just wanted to see the fun. But the fun proved too expensive. For when he returned to his kingdom everything was over. Queen Pingala had embraced death on a burning pyre. Hearing about the accidental death of the royal husband, she could not guess it to be a practical joke.

The king was shocked. He met the Saint and explained to him the whole thing. By his miraculous power he made her alive.

Bhartrihari was so much impressed by the Saint's performance that he insisted on initiation. Gorakhnath initiated the king on condition that he would spend at least twelve years on meditation as a monk. Bhartrihari agreed and left his kingdom for twelve years. He spent twelve years as a wandering monk.

On his return he took up the rule of his kingdom. There is an interesting story about his final abdication of the kingdom.

It seems Guru Gorakhnath had given him a fruit which would keep one ever young. He thought, for him preservation of youth was no problem. He knew *yogic Sadhana*, which could keep him always young and vigorous. So with his miraculous power he passed on the fruit to the queen. The queen by then had grown intimacy with the Prime Minister. She thought his youth was more important. She passed it on to him. The Prime Minister had a keep. So he thought that preservation of her youth was more important. So he passed it on to her. The woman thought the best person to have the miraculous fruit was the king because he would do good to so many. So in the

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hope of getting some favour of the king. She passed on the miraculous fruit to the king.

It was a rare gift. It was a token of great personal affection of the king. When the king got the fruit he discovered a new truth. He found how people are faithless. At every stage, the learned king discovered the myth of love. He immediately said the following immortal lines:

Yan opi chintayami satatam mo ee sabirakta,

sapichchhati janaag Sajanaanyaskta,

Asmin Kritay cha tusyati kachadnya,

Dhiktangcha madanancha imancha mancha!

Of them whom I have been thinking ceaselessly, she is ceaselessly indifferent to me. And the one who loved and longed for is holding dear someone else. And one other lady is pleasing this humble self. What an irony of fate: Fie to this woman, to the God of Love as well as to this woman who is so loyal to me and to me too!

Bhartrihari left kingdom finally and took his final shelter at the feet of Saint Gorakhnath.

Bhartrihari was a very learned scholar. His treatise *Bairagya Satak* or *Sringar Satak* or other works are gems in Indian literature with high self-realised spiritual messages, Bhartrihari's works form an important chapter in the literary history of Indian Culture.

As a saint, Bhartrihari never had any malice against even Queen Pingala. He went as a mendicant to ask for alms to her and addressed her as a mother! The famous song *Bhiksa day Maiya Pingala* is even now on the lips of bards in North India.

Bhartrihari had many disciples, most famous among them being Ratannath. He had a large number of followers in north west India—Kohat, Jalalabad. There were some followers also in Kabul. Ratan never wore the typical ear rings of the *Nathapanthis*. When criticised for this lapse, he cut his chest and showed all the hidden *Kundala*, ear rings to the surprised audience. The saint said that faith in God was more important than rituals. When people were afraid of the successor to

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Ratannath the saint "produced" a boy saint out of his body by miracle. Because he was produced out of the body of Ratannath, he was popular as Kayanath. Kayanath had a liberal view. He had a large number of Muslim devotees. The Muslim devotees affectionately addressed him as Quaimuddin. He was also respected by the Buddhists.

With the spread of the messages by these disciples, Gorakhnath was a living deity in whole of north India. In Punjab, Puran Bhagat, son of King Shalibahan left the palace and took to monkhood.

In Punjab, the most popular songs on *Heer Ranjha* also mention the kindness of Saint Gorakhnath.

Among the devotees of Rajasthan, Saint Guga was a direct disciple of Gorkhnath. He was a liberal preacher and mixed with people from all castes and creeds. In north west he commanded great respect in the realm of spirituality.

By and large, Saint Gorakhnath was a *Shaiva*. The aim of life according to him was to attain complete renunciation like the Lord. There must be a burning desire in the heart of the devotee for attianing God. There must be hundred percent confidence in the mercy of the Lord. That needed austere penance. Gorakhnath's approach was more similar to Mahavira than any other Saints. Through *Yoga* all desires must be burnt. The body to the saint hardly had any meaning. The whole body must be turned into a string instrument which must echo the eternal message *neti neti*. The whole life and existence must be fixed only on one point. The body is a citadel of God and nothing else. Through the body only the Supreme God must be realised.

The devotees' only aim should be realisation of the *Ista*, the deity, *Shiva*. Mere control on mind won't do. Mere muttering the *mantra* won't achieve the goal. One must conquer the 'point', *Bindujoy* and *Bayujoy*. It was the highest form of *Hatha Yoga*.

In this connection Saint Gorakhnath says :

Mana thir tow paban thir

Paban thir tow bindu thir

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Bindu thir tow Kandha thir

Baley Gorakhdev sakal thir.

If the mind is still, air is still. If air is still, the point will be still. If the point is still, the whole thing will be still. This is the highest description of *Hatha Yoga*. The *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* is something akin to this.

The body must be ever clean. Gorakhnath's target is to turn each *Jiva* to *Shiva*. That is possible only through *kayasiddhi*. In his immortal *Gorakh Vanee*, Gorakhnath says *Jiva thoin Shiva hoiba prani.*

A *siddha yogi* is free from all sufferings of life. He is *jibanmukta*. He is quite unattached to worldly things. He becomes *Pranabtonu*. The whole body resounds with *Onkar*.

Although Gorakhanath himself preferred the severest austerity, he prescribed the middle path for ordinary men. So later on he amended his earlier statements. He says

Kandarpa rup Kaika mandan

Abirthakai ulichou

Gorakh Kahoi sunnou ray bhondu

Aranda ami kato suchou

The human body is by nature a paragon of beauty. Why unnecessary mutilate it ? Gorakhnath says, O fool, why unnecessarily waste nectar by showering it on weeds ?

The most important aspect of Gorakhnath's preaching was the liberal approach of the Saint. He never discriminated against high or low caste. He offered his divine nectar to all—*brahmins shudras*, caste Hindus or high caste, irrespective of their status. He did not care whether the devotee was rich or poor. Whereas he had many royal personalities in his fold, he equally embraced people from lowest strata of society. To him all were incarnations of *Shiva*. He had offered his blessings to thousands of devotees. Whole social order had benefitted the by his generous spiritual leadership.

Both Gorakhnath and his equally illustrious *Guru* are famous for miraculously bringing rains at times of drought in northern India and Nepal.

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The last twelve years of the most eventful life of Gorakhnath was spent in Gorakhpur. An *ashram* was started there. The more intimate among the disciples, Gahininath, Dharamnath, Lachmannath, Dayanath and Gopichand, all assembled there. They were all summoned by the saint. He bade all good bye and with full conciousness left for the immortal abode.

Gorakhnath appeared on the scene of Indian spiritual life at a time when Buddhism was still a popular living-faith. Just a hundred years had hardly passed when Sankaracharya spread the message of *Vedanta* throughout India. Gorakhnath was the most popular spiritual figure after Sankaracharya.

Like Sankara, Gorakhnath was also a great organiser. He laid the newly spread philosophy *Natha* cult on a strong foundation.

Buddism was yet a living-faith in major parts of north-eastern region of India. Without advancing a confrontation with the existing faith, Gorakhnath preached the new faith silently and determinedly with a missionery zeal. Thousands and millions thronged to his popular fold of *Natha* cult in no times.

To start with, Gorakhnath took up the task of popularising the earlier as well as contemporary saints, like Adinath and Matsyendranath. He organised the devotees into a new order. which became a powerful spiritual force in whole of India and many countries abroad. Gorakhnath popularised the new faith in Kamrup in Assam, Nepal, Gorakhpur, Varanasi, Dhinodar, Hinglaj in northern and eastern India. In the south, too, his message percolated down to Kerala where the followers of *yogi* Gurukkal took up *Nath* cult as their new spiritual faith. There are reasons to believe that it has spread across the country to Iran, Arab and some parts of USSR.

In USSR there is a temple of Jwalamukhi at Baku where it is distinctly inscribed that founder was a *Nathapanthi* worshipper of *Shiva*. It is also recorded that Sufi Saints of Iran and Arab had communications of ideas and benefitted each other by mutual intercourse. There are reasons to believe that contemporary sufi saints were influenced by *Kayayoga Sadhana* of the *Nathapanthis*.

The *Nathapanthis* lay greatest stress on *Hatha yoga*. More popularly known as *Kayasadhana*, the devotee used to attain

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eternal life. It depended on the mere wish of the devotee whether he should continue this life or leave it. *Rishi* Patanjali, the great exponent of *yoga* system has given description of details of the discipline. In the *Yoga sutra, Kaivalyapada* he says *janmousadhi-mantra-tapah samadhiyah siddhayah.* So it surmised that the *Siddha marga* and *Nathamarga* were very much in vogue long ago.

Gorakhnath however had a distinct path of his own. It was clearly a path of *shaivism.* Lord *Shiva* is the main deity. It is wrong to get the *Nathapanthis* mixed up with any other cult. Among the pilgrimages of the *Nathapanthis* all the holy places are associated only with *Shiva.* The holy temples they have erected or visited have the deity of Lord *Shiva* installed there. Even in their daily costumes the followers of Nathapanthis initiate Lord *Shiva.* When Gorakhnath approached his *Guru* at the latter's *ashram* he was dressed also the typical *Shiva* style. And the holy place he met him at was the temple of *Pashupatinath.* They are also mentioned to have been addicted to *ganja* and *bhang,* indigenous *hashis* which are supposed to be hot favourites of *shiva.*

So it is absolutely wrong to surmise that *Nathapanthis* formed an affshoot of Buddhism. There might have been some similarities between the two.

The *Nathapanthis* believe hundred per cent in complete renunciation aspect of the *Mahayogi Maheshwara.* They also blow their mouths with the typical sound *bom bom,* which is a characteristic of the *shaivites.*

The *yogis* are known for their miraculous powers. Among the *Nath yogis* Gorkhnath was the most powerful saint with miraculous power. It is recorded in history: "The legends about Goraksa's miraculous powers increased in North India, including Nepal, more than in East India, especially in later literature connected with Guga and Puran Bhagat and were responsible for the establishment of important centres of the cult at Sialkot, Tilla and other places situated north of the Vindhayas." The Saint is credited with giving lives back to many dead persons including some belonging to royal palace.

Evolution of Tantra also refers to Gorakhnath and Matsyendranath. It is observed, "The *Natha* sect originated from the teachings of the Siddhacharya, as its reputed founder

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Matsyendranatha was in all likelihood the same as the first Siddha Lui-pada. The great teachers of this mystic sect were all called *Nathas* and the most famous among them were Mina Natha, Goraksha Nath a and Chaurangi Natha. Their teachings had a great influence in Bengal and miraculous tales about them became the subject of popular songs in Bengali. Two other contemporary mystic sects were—*The Abadhut* and *Bauls*. The *Abadhuts* had many similarities with *Nathas* but the *Bauls* were inspired by *Vaishnava Sahajia*."

Gorakhsa Samhita is ascribed to the Saint Gorakhnath. But it is doubtful whether the saint composed it himself. It is now felt by scholars that treatise was completed most probably by his followers much later. It is authentically observed that "The name of Gorakshanath does not appear as the author of any early *Yogic* or *Tantric* works existing either in original or in Tibetan translation."

The saint represented the highest teachings of the Natha cult. He was the *Adi Siddha* of that strictly celibate and rigidly austere *yogic* cult which may be called the cult of Goraksha—Gorakh Pantha of Hindi Rajasthan.

Goraksha was most influenced by his Guru Matsyendra Nath who was, by and large, a saint of *Shaiva* faith. *Natha* means Lord. "The story of the beginning of creation according to the tradition of the Natha cult shows remarkable affinity with the *Rig-Vedic* hymn of creation and the opening lines of *Manu Samhita*. Before the beginning of creation there was all encompassing Darkness and Void. The impulse of creation made a ripple in the void resulting in a bubble, an egg. The egg was hatched, and out of it emerged the primal God. From the sweat of *Adi Natha*, the primal God, was born his spouse Vetaka, also called *Manasa*".

Mahayogi Gorakhnath had a tremendous impact on whole of north India unparallelled in history. Next to Sankaracharya no other Saint played so great a role in rousing God-consciousness among the masses in ancient post-Buddhist era. Not merely restricted to the cult of *Nathas*, the Saint's message of divinity had far reaching effect. By popularising the attainments of the *Siddha yogis* he brought a new flood of religious movement which was liberal in outlook and deeply ethical in content. He

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had accepted and preached the messages of *Upanishad, Geeta* and *Vedanta* but he stressed more on *Yoga* and *Siddhi.*

Sankaracharya was an uncommon Saint with versatile brilliance and his message covered more or less only intellectural *elite*. No doubt the task was set in by the monastic order at four *muths* by his equally illustrious disciples. But Gorakhnath had played equally important role among the masses by stresing the tremendous importance of *yoga* and *Tantra.*

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YAMUNACHARYA

(953 AD—1053 AD)

India is most facinating country with the greatest treasure of secrets of the spiritual realm. It happens only in India—a young scholar of hardly twelve getting half a kingdom for winning a spiritual debate; enjoying the highest comforts of life and then renouncing the palace in search of real wealth, that is Truth. Mahavira, Buddha were princes. They were born in royal families. They left their kingdoms in search of real truth. They got it.

Here is an equally interesting character, if not more, a young boy of twelve winning a kingdom by means of real knowledge in unique power of debate. A king lost a bate with his consort and had to part with half the kingdom.

It is one of the thrilling stories in the history of Indian culture and philosophy. It is not a hearsay or just traditional gossip. It is a historical and historic event.

To cut the detailed long story short the incident may be narrated in brief below.

All States patronised learning in India. It was in the kingdom of *Pandya* that there reigned one learned great scholar Kolahal in the intellectual world of the South. He was the Court Scholar, recognised by the king as the most learned man in the State. He was much respected by all neighbouring scholars including the king who used to be his chief patron. During those days other scholars, who ran *chatuspatis* or Sanskrit schools, were patronised by the king, but the head of the educational institutions had to record their obeisance to the court scholar by paying some token fees just as a mark of respect and sign of acceptance as his junior.

These scholar used to hold occasional debates where discussions took place on varied subjects from philosophy to popular politics. The king encouraged learning and always witnessed these battles of wits.

Whenever any such debates took place, the general rule

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was,—as a convention it was prevalent throughout India—that the victor would be accepting the vanquished as his disciple. So the relation never became bitter. It was only an intellectual exercise.

Pandit Kolahal, no doubt, was the most learned man in the Pandya Kingdom but his knowledge was restricted only to bookish one. He had no experience of realised divine knowledge.

Kolahal was very proud of his knowledge and social status. He simply did not care for any fellow-scholars and occasionally wanted to show his authority, whenever he got any chance. His rudeness was proverbial as his tyranny to young scholars, some of whom were serving him as apprentices.

There was one Bhasyacharya Pandit equally famous in the field of learning. He was a realised soul and used to teach most sincerely some students who came to him from long distances. One day Pandit Kolahal discovered that for over three years this Bhasyacharya Pandit did not pay his annual obeisance. The amount was not so important as the authority over the man. Kolahal Pandit was more particular to preserve his authority over all the scholars. He wanted to reign over them intellectually and wanted to keep proofs thereof.

When this hot headed Pandit discovered that Bhasyacharya Pandit had not been caring to pay his annual tribute for three years continuously he simply jumped over his apprentice disciple Bonji and asked him to explain his lapse.

The young disciple had to trek the distance on foot to collect the dues from Bhasyacharya Pandit. His plea that due to drought or failure of crop the poor scholar could not pay the tribute had fallen on deaf ears of the *Guru*. He did not like any argument. He was a matter-of-fact man and meant business. He instructed his disciple not only to get every penny out of the scholar but also find out from passers by fellow villagers whether they had started discussing that Bhasyacharya Pandit did not recognise Kolahal Pandit any more. That was the man's weakest point. Above everything he wanted recognition by all scholars. Their tributes were only symbols of acceptance.

When the tired disciple reached Bhasyachary's house he met only a young boy who politely informed that his preceptor

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Bhasyacharya Pandit had gone out and would not be available soon. In the absence of the *Guru* all senior students had also bunked the school. Except the tiny one none could give Bonji any details.

Bonji talked to the young student quite disdainfully. He threatened him of closing down the school because of the non-payment of annual dues.

The way Bonji talked to the young lad made him angry. He retorted back in the same tone and tune.

Kolahal's disciple did not expect this from the youngster. How could he digest the urchin's challenging language? The young boy told him on his face, "Your *Guru's* poor learning is obviously reflected in your rude behaviour. That you are a completely unlettered man is clear from your accents. That you people know no manners and culture is reflected in your demeanour."

Bonji threatened him with counter words : "You foolish boy, do you know who Kolahal is? Have you heard his name? Do you know his power? He can get this whole *chatuspati* demolished in no time?"

"He may be anything but I am convinced of one thing. Your *Guru* must be a completely unlettered, uneducated person. I can prove that?"

"How?" asked the angry disciple.

"Who does not know on earth that learning begets modesty? Who does not know that real knowledge means appreciation of other's finer points? Who does not know that a really learned Indian scholar would be an incarnation of love? A learned man is always a lucky person. Your *Guru* is far from any one of them!"

This was the limit. Bonji had no words to utter for sometime. He was not ready for such a confrontration. That too from a young lad of twelve.

Bonji hurled all sorts of abusive languages on Bhasyacharya Pandit.

The child did not allow his opponent to return unopposed. He just went in front of him, stood erect and with a firm voice said, "Look here gentleman, go, tell your

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unlettered *guru* that all his knowledge is shallow. All his ego and vanity are meaningless. I know his depth. Go and tell him that I would like to enter into a debate in the open royal court in the presence of the king of Pandya. Let him defeat me. I am serious. Give him this errand."

Bonji got dazed. Hardly a boy of twelve was challenging the most learned scholar of whole of South India and so seriously ! Was he wasting all his time with a mad boy ?

"Take it with all seriousness. Do you know who am I ? Acharya Nathamuni was my grandfather and Ishwarmuni was my father. We are servants of Sri Ranganath. You can take this as the words of Sri Ranganath. Let your Kolahal Pandit know he has to defend himself against a disciple of Bhasyacharya before he comes to touch the *Chatuspati*. The question of demolishing it will be discussed after that."

The story reached Achary Kolahal and finally the king. Kolahal's full name was Vidvajjana Kolahal. He was not only an arrogant man, he was very vindictive.

With eyes red and body shivering with rage Kolahal's disciple described the incident exactly as it took place.

A contemporary report records, "Kolahal could not help laughing when he learned the age of his rival. All present in the court of the King said that the disciple of Bhasyacharya had only shown the pertness so natural in a boy of his age and that it was proper to admonish him for that. In order to ascertain if the boy did really mean what he had said and if he was a normal or an insane creature, the Pandya king sent another man with the words : 'if he really wants to argue, get him here without delay. He should be reprimanded forthwith".

Bhasyacharya got terribly frightened when he heard everything. He told Yamunacharya, his disciple, that it was not a proper step for him. Acharya Kolahal was the most learned and influential scholar of whole of South India.

All knew that the invincible Vidvajjanakolahal used to extract, by order of the king, a yearly tax from the scholars whom he defeated. Yamunacharya's *Guru*, too, had been paying him the tax. The arrears stood only for want of money.

Bhasyacharya had no intention to annoy him. The best thing for him would have been to change the date for payment of tax to a future date.

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"Nothing doing Sir, with your blessings and the Holy name of Sri Ranganath let me enter into the debate. The very fact that he has ego and vanity clearly shows that his downfall is imminent." Yamunacharya was adament.

The other disciples of Bhasyacharya along with their *Guru* were counting beads. The King was with Kolahal. There would be royal wrath. Who could fight with a king ?

Meanwhile, the royal messenger came with king's message.

When the messenger of the king communicated the royal behest to Yamunacharya, he replied, "By all means I am bound to obey the order of his Majesty, the King. But as I am going to argue with a royal court scholar of Kolahal's eminence please submit to His Majesty that I expect to be escorted from here with the honour due to a scholar. He may either send a conveyance here to take me to the court or send Kolahal here."

The King agreed and sent a royal palanquin with regular escorts.

Yamunacharya touched the feet of the *Guru*, remembered Sri Ranganath and entered the palanquin with full confindence. The palanquin was followed by a huge crowd.

There was a stir in the whole kingdom. Acharya Kolahal was a known scholar. As he had followers he had enemies too. All got curious about the ensuing incident.

Everywhere the topic of discussion was about the ensuing debate. Even in the palace the king and the queen were actively wrangling over the prospect of the child's performance.

The king said, "As a cat plays with a mouse, so will Kolahal defeat and destroy the boy."

The queen somehow intuitively was favouring the young boy. She said, "As a single spark of fire turns a mountain of cotton into ashes, so will this little boy bring Kolahal's mansion of pride to the ground."

The king shouted indignantly, "What do you stake to back your faith on the boy ?"

The queen said, "I would become the slave of your bond—slave."

The king got excited. He said, "You fond woman, forsooth a terrible pledge you have taken. I too promise that, if

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the boy defeats Kolahal, I will give away half my kingdom to him."

Yamunacharya reached the court. He entered the conference room of the king with grace. The young scholar paid his obeisance to the king and queen and wished the scholars assembled in the court. There was pin drop silence. There was excitement not only in the royal court but in the whole capital. "It was an unprecendeted thing for a boy to go to meet the chief Pandit of the royal court in a debate on the *Sastras*. Men, women and children hastened to have a glance of this wonderful lad."

Acharya Bhasyacharya was in breathless suspense. His mental tension was limitless. He loved this fatherless young and bright lad as his own son. He could not think of the penalty in case of a defeat. He was utterly puzzled. He was in prayers, counting the beads. The speed was moving fast as his pulse beating. He had no alternative.

The king received the young lad's salutations and offered him a seat next to the royal couple facing the uncrowned prince of learning, Vidvajjana Kolahal.

Pandit Kolahal looked at the tiny lad, "Seeing his slight build and tender age", Kolahal said jesting to the queen, "*Ala Vandana* ? Is this the boy who has come to conquer me ?"

"*Ala Vandar*—yes, this is he who has come to conquer you."

The king directed Kolahal to start putting questions to the young scholar.

Kolahal never took the child seriously. So he satrted with simple questions on grammar, on minor books like A*marakosa*.

The young boy realised that he was not being treated seriously. So he immediately asserted himself as a real rival and said, "As you think I am a child you are putting all these minor questions which I could tackle years ago. A boy as I am, you are slighting me. The great sage Ashtavakra defeated saint Bandi at the court of Janaka. Was he then a boy or an old man like you? Do you judge the learning of a person by his size? Then a huge bullock would be a greater scholar than you are."

Kolahal restrained his anger as the court was flooded with hearty laughter at the boy's witty reply.

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Now it was Kolahal's turn to reply.

The young scholar said "I shall like to place before you three questions. If you are able to refute them, I shall acknowledge your supremacy."

"My first question is this—your mother is not a barren woman. Refute it, if you can."

Had my mother been barren, then my birth were an impossibility. But it is a great shame to be unable to refute the boy. What am I to do now ? So thinking and not knowing what to do Kolahal kept—quite like a dumb man. All the courtiers were astonished.

Then Yamunacharya asked the second question by an introductory remark like a seasoned debator, "Sir, can you not refute my first prosposition by your all-conquering intelligence? Then here is my second one. The Pandya king is supremely righteous. Please refute this."

Kolahal got puzzled. How can he refute this? The king was sitting next to him. "Indeed could he ever be so ungrateful as to call the king unrighteous? The boy would surely bring about his ruin," he mused. His countenance turned pale. He could not canceal his anger.

Yamunacharya said, "So you cannot refute either of the two qustions. Let me give you a third chance. O scarer of scholars, this is an easy proposition. I say that the great queen seated in front of us is as chaste as Savitri. Please refute this."

Kolahhl could not check his temper any more. He simply burst out, "You chap, your sole motive is to muzzle my mouth. Can any loyal person ever say that the king is unrighteous or the queen unchaste? True, my mouth has been gagged, but that does not mean that I am defeated. Now you must refute these sinister contentions of yours. If you cannot do that you should, by order of his Majesty, the king, lose your life, for you have through your insinuations cast aspersions on both the king and the queen."

There was excitement from supporters of both.

Yamunacharya stood up confidently and said, "I shall refute all the statements one by one."

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"Who does not know that according to our *Sastras*, the woman who has but only one child is to be considered barren? According to Manu, the father of one son may marry again to have more than one son. In the *bhasya* of Medhatithi also we are told *ekah putrah aputro ba*—(having) one son is like having no son. *Manu Samhita* says, *Ekaputro hi aputra lokavadat*.

"Let us come to the second proposition. I shall now prove that the king is not righteous."

Addressing the king the young scholar said, "A king who protects in every way his subjects gets a sixth part of their religious merits and sixth part of their sins when incapable of protecting them properly. However able a rule the king might be, owing to the influence of *Kaliyuga*, the subjects are naturally irreligious and the king has to take his sixth share of the sins committed by them. Therefore on the authority of the holy texts it can be said that the king has to bear a heavy burden of unrighteousness."

There was applause from the whole court.

"Now let us come to the third proposition about the chastity of the queen. Manu says, 'in his royal prowess the king is the varitable manifestation of Fire, Air, the Sun, the Moon, Yama (the lord of virtue), Kubera, Varuna and Indra.' Therefore the queen is wedded not merely to the individual, the king, but, along with that, she becomes the spouse of those eight. How then can it be said that she is chaste?"

The whole court got thrilled at the vast learning and unique power of debate of the young scholar.

The queen said, "*Alavandar Alavandar*" and took him on her lap.

The king paid his due respect to the victor scholar. The king who all along had been taking the young boy lightly and even quarrelled with the queen on this point told Yamunacharya with due respect, "oh Alavandar, today you have conquered proud Kolahal by your learning and skill. The star fades in the face of the rising sun. I surrender to you the pendant who has brought misery to so many scholars and sought to bring capital punishment on you a while ago. You may deal with him as you please. And please relieve me of a pledge by accepting half

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of my kingdom as a prize for your victory."

Yamunacharya came down from the lap of the queen. The king led him to the throne. The whole capital and finally the whole kingdom celebrated the victory of a young scholar over an experienced seasoned one.

Yamunacharya pardoned Kolahal.

The boy soon proved a very successful ruler. Enemies who mistook his power and intellect and discounted his supreme war strategy got humiliated and accepted his supremcy.

Alavandar became a popular ruler.

What a strange world this is. The boy, grandson of an enightened soul, so devoted to the Almighty had hardly any time for his spiritual pursuit. He got himslef so stuck up in royal duties that the king's subjects had all praise and happiness during his long rule. But God was negleeted. God-realisation was brushed aside. The Alavandar had to spend all his time in the royal court—in war strategp, in revenue policy formulation, in administrative reforms, in public works department. Sri Ranganath was only smiling. Saint Nathamuni, one of the greatest of the Saints of India and founder of the *Nath Sampradaya*, was the grandfather of Alavandar. He never came to the royal palace but loved the grandson so much that he kept a vigil on the young king from a distance regularly. He was worried about the grandson's prospect of a spiritual life. It was none of his intentions or plans to see the grandson saddled as a king. He was not at all in peace to find his grandson turning so materialistic. It is possible only in India. Nathamuni could understand that his purpose to come to earth was over. He remembered Alavandar, the favourite, but did not like to interfere in his royal assignments. He finally breathed his last with God's name on his lips. But before that he did one important thing. As is recorded by a saint, "Before breathing his last, he called Rama Misra or Manakkal Nambi, his chief disciple and said, "Please see that the boy, being imersed in the enjoyment of things temporal, does not forget his duty. I leave him to your care."

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Alavandar ruled for exactly twenty three years. When he was just thirty five, Manakkal Nambi, remembering the last behest of his *Guru* appeared at the palace gate to seek an interview with the king".

This Nathamuni was an enlightened soul. His son Ishwarmuni was a devoted saintly man. He would spend all his time in *Vishnu upasana*. But when he was young he died. Yamuna, the grandson of Nathamuni and son of Ishwarmuni was born in 953 AD. He was an extraodinarily meritorious lad and had a sharp memory. He could reproduce whatever he read or heard once only. He had been put under the charge of Bhasyacharya for higher specialised education. He was brought up till then by his grandmother and the widowed mother. The grandfather became a mendicant and kept an eye on the child from a distance.

Nathamuni knew everything about Yamuna's performances and brilliant achievements and who in the kingdom did not know ?

Now that he was no more and that the king had already reached thirtyfifth year of life, Manakkal Nambi, the illustrious disciple of the saint, had to intervene. He sought for an interview but when he saw it was not so easy he had to play a trick. The details are like this :

"Seeing the gate crowded with the vehicles of tributory kings and troops of soliders, and finding that even the biggest aristocrats had to wait long before gaining permission to enter the palace, he, the shabbily dressed *sannyasi*, gave up all hope of getting in through the main gate. Even if the sentries allowed him to enter it was clear he could not converse with the king surrounded as the was by other kings and nobles and ever busy with royal duties. He had therefore to think of some other means to have an interview with the king."

"Ascetics like the green, named *tuduvalar* which is said to develop the quality of *Sattva*. After cellecting some of those greens, Nambi approached the chief cook of the royal kitchen. at the back of the palace and said, 'dear brother, may *Narayana* bless you! May I entreat you to serve every day to our king, who is spiritually disposed, some preparation of these greens which develop the quality of *Sattva*! By this his life on earth will be lengthened and his intelligence quickened. I shall get you

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these greens every day? The cook was a pious man and knew the rare virtue of these familiar greens. So he accepted them eagerly and promised to serve them every day."

The great loyal saint had to repeat the drill for quite a long time. He had to do it because he was promise-bound to his Guru Nathamuni to look after the king and change his outlook and turn it to God-realisation. He repeated this for months patiently, diligently and waited for an interview. To be exact, the rare description says," For about a couple of months Mahatma Nambi supplied a quantity of those greens every day and the cook prepared various kinds of dishes and served them to the king. Alavandar used to take these preparations with great relish. Nambi came to know of this. One day he stayed away deliberately. On that day the king missed the *tuduvalar* dish and asked the cook why he did not cook the greens that day.

The cook replied, "the *Sadhu* who used to get these greens did not bring them today."

"Who is that *Sadhu*? At what price do you purchase these from him?" the king enquired.

"Your Majesty, I do not know the name and whereabouts of that *Sadhu*. He does not accept any payment. Out of love and regard for you, he procures the greens from somewhere and of his own accord. These greens develop *sattvik* intellect and make for longivity. But I do not know why he did not come today."

The king grew thoughtful and then told the cook, "If he happens to come to-morrow bring him to me with due courtesy and honour." Nothing, specially no big work, can be done in a hurry. So Mahatma Nambi's trick clicked. Genius is patience.

Next day when the saint went to the kitchen door with the greens the cook requested him respectfully, "Revered Sir, His Majesty, the king wants to see you."

The Saint knew this. He was only waiting for this great oportunity. He was fully ready for it. He at once asked the royal cook to show him the way.

The good cook led him to the king who was sitting all alone in his palace pondering over the mendicant who had been taking pains to look after his food without even meeting him for a single day. The king was puzzled for a minute when the

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cook presented the mendicant before him without any notice. Alavandar could of course immediately sense that this must have been the *Sadhu*, the well-wisher in the background, the mystery man.

Alavandar was a learned God-fearning king. So at once he greeted the fan in saffron, and said, "Sir, I salute your holy feet. I am your servant. Please be frank with me. Tell me with what end in view you get these delicious greens every day for me, and take no payment for them. How can I be of some service to you?" This was exactly what Mahatma Nambi wanted.

The Saint told Alavandar, "I wish to tell you something in private."

The cook was directed to leave the room. Both sat facing each other in the bolted room.

"Your Majesty, it is long since your grandfather, the great-souled Nathamuni went to *Vaikuntha* (that means passed away) I daresay you have not forgotten him. I am one of his servants. Before he breathed his last, he left with me aa immense treasure to be handed over to you at the right time. Pleace accept the treasure and relieve me."

Alavandar was glad to have met a direct disciple of his saintly grandfather. He was happier to have known about the grandfather's hidden treasure which he thought would be so handy at a time when he was planning a battle against a rebel feudal lord.

The king was relieved mentally of a financial problem. He was grateful to the honest mendicant who instead of usurping the secret treasure took all the trouble to meet him and pass him like this. He appreciated the gesture and told him, "Sir, you are really a *Sadhu* of great renunciation, for without keeping the treasure for yourself, you have been looking for the time to hand it over to me. Now kindly tell me where the treasure is."

The great mendicant told the king to follow him. "It is installed within seven walls between the two rivers. A great serpent has been guarding it, and the end of every twelfth year a demon from the south sea goes over there to inspect it has been kept. shrouded by the power of a *mantra*. Through this

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mantra aided by the power of a leaf, the treasure will be made visible and accessible to you."

The king got excited.

"I shall immediately like to go there with four divisio ns of my army. You have to show us the way."

"I shall certainly guide you there but not with any division of army. It will not be advisable to accompany anybody to the secret sacred spot. You have to follow me alone."

Alavandar agreed.

The saintly man must have also his own charm. Under his spell the king immediately agreed to accompany him.

"I am ready to go all alone with you. I shall do whatever you bid me. Let us not delay.

The king went with the mendicant after making all necessary arrangements to run the administration by his trusted people. But nobody knew anything about his new adventure.

They first proceeded northwards from Madurai. They were walking. The king got tired soon. By noon they had to stop. Nambi advised him rest. The saint started reciting the *slokas* from *Bhagavatgeeta* which the king could follow so easily. He knew many of the stanzas by heart but did not cultivate them for the last twenty three years. For long the king had been totally oblivious of the spiritual world. The sweet sounds revived his memory. The worlds eemed illusory. His home was on the other shore of the ocean of *Sansara*. Blinded by illusion, all this time he had been considering the unreal to be the real. He had been mistaking a tavern for his home. Thoughts of this kind naturally began to surge up in his mind. He began to relish like nectar the sweet chanting of the *Geeta*. After Nambi had finished chanting the king with folded hands entreated, 'Revered Sir, if you see, no objection, kindly make this servant of yours a rightful drunker of the nectar of the blessed *Geeta*. As I listen to you, I feel like giving up all power and wealth and moving about with you in this world like a wayfarer. Indeed, I am a wayfarer here, my home is elsewhere. Take pity on me and make me a rightful enjoyer of the ambrosia of the *Geeta*. From today I am your disciple!"

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Saint Nambi was thrilled but he did not express anything. "O king, I am exceedingly glad to see my hopes fulfilled. It is not for you to become a disciple of mine, but for me to become yours. As desired by you, I shall explain the meaning of the *Geeta* according to my ability. If there is not pressure of work, why not stay here and study the *Geeta* for a few days ?"

The king, by now, was a changed person. "Whatever the pressure of work, the study of the *Geeta* is the first and the greatest duty; this I have realised while in your company."

They studied *Geeta* for some days. Alavandar was leaning towards renunciation. He was forgetting all his power and pomp, his royal duties and earthly enjoyment.

As the *Srimad Bhagavatam* says :

"*Itararagabismaranam nrinam*. The sweetness of His beauty make one forget all other attractions."

Acharya Nambi recited that famous line where Sri Krishna Himself says, "Oh Partha, the *Geeta* is my heart, the *Geeta* is my quintessence".

Geeta may hridayang Partha
Geeta may saramuttamam.

Days passed on discussions and recitations of the Holy Scripture. The only message that came out of the entire discussion was renunciation. The discussion was bearing fruit. The king was feeling an inner change step by step.

As the pure hearted saint was explaining to the king some of the verses so sincerely tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"Be absorbed in me. Lodge your mind in me. Dwell in me. Do not doubt it here and hereafter".

Mayyeba mana adhatswa
Maya buddhim nibeshaya
Nivasisyasi mayyeba
Ata murdham na samsaya.

The enlightened king was repenting for his time in luxury and lust. "Alas ! alas ! all these days I have lived a beastly life,

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with my mind fixed on lust and lure yet I was proud of my intellect. Fie upon my intelligence! Ah, when will that blessed day come when I shall lift my heart away from the mire and fix it solely on God? Oh my *Guru*, when will that blessed day dawn on me?"

The king really became restless. His desire for God-realisation made him mad. The kind hearted Mahatma Nambi told him, "Oh King, your pure mind rests ever on the blessed lotus feet of *Narayana*. Only like the clouds covering the sun, desire for worldly objects, for the time being, hid from sight that blessed image of God as effulgent as a million suns that imperishable life of all beings. That cloud is about to disperse. The happy sun will shine again and dispel the darkness of your heart."

Alavandar was only looking forward to God-realisation. He was looking for the spiritual path-finder.

Alavandar was lucky in many ways. From childhood he was treated with fond care. His grandfather, later on his grand-mother and mother looked after him well. Then his *Guru* Bhasyacharya brought him up with great affectionate care. "He did not know what was meant by suffering. After becoming a king, he had been ruling over others. He had none to rule over him. Now the attitude of servitude (*dashya bhava*) surged up in his mind. The Mother could not wheedle him any more with the sucking toy."

He immediately thought of giving up the royal robe and fall at the feet of Nambi Pandit, the enlightened one. He told the mendicant, "Please keep me at your feet. Make me your servant, an ordinary disciple. After getting rid of slavery to lust and lure, it would be the greatest glory for me to become a servant of a great man like you who has found in *Narayana* his sole refuge. Do, therefore, take pity on me. No longer do I desire to secure the wealth left by my grandfather. Please save me from servility to lust and anger by accepting me as your servant."

The details of the king's renunciation are recorded in the following words:

"Nambi's heart was filled with joy to see the blazing fire of renunciation in the heart of Alavandar. But he said in a grave voice 'O King, can a large hearted great man like you be ever a

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slave of the senses ? You are the eternal servant of *Hrishikesha*. Your grandfather was among the foremost of the servants of God. You are born in that noble lineage. Today I am seeing in you the manifestation of Mahatma Nathamuni. Blessed indeed I am !"

Alvandar was overwhelmed with emotions. Yes, that was his real background. He was wasting his time in a wrong way role. He immediately held a hand of the enlightened mendicant and told Nambi, "My master, please do not praise me. I am really determined to renounce the world and follow you for the rest of my life. In this life's deathly ocean, without a helmsman like you, my poor raft will sink, and the alligators of desire will eat me up. So be kind to me."

Saint Nambi was reciting one of the most important stanzas from the *Geeta*.

Sarvadharman parityajya
Mumekam shranam Braja.
Ahang twam sarvapapebhyo
Mokshayisyami ma suchah.

Lay down all duties in me, your refuge. Fear no longer, for I will save you from sin and from bondage.

Alavandar's mind was far away. Acharya Nambi did not realise that perhaps. "Your Majesty, let us make a move from here. We must reach the temple of the Lord."

With a broken voice Alavandar said, "Call me a 'king' no more. I am only your ordinary disciple and most humble servant."

"I have not yet fulfilled my promise. I have to hand over you the treasure of your grandfather."

Both the devotees resumed their journey next day. After walking continuously for four days they reached the bank of Kaveri. After a holy bath they left for the holy temple of Sri Ranganatha with seven walls. They covered six gates.

Approahcing the door of the seventh gate Nambi looked on Sri Ranganatha and addressed Alavandar:

"O Pure-souled One! There in front of us lies on *Sesha* the treasure of your grandfather. He, whose feet are being served

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by Lakshmi; on whose navel-lotus is seated *Brahma* the creator, in whom lies coiled up the entire cosmos; who is the very quintescence of supreme beautitude and peace,—He is the treasure of your grandfather. Being his grandson, you are the sole rightful heir to this treasure. Take it and free me of my debt."

In his heart of hearts Yamunacharya was an enlightened soul. Otherwise it would have never been possible for him to defeat the most learned scholar of whole of South India at the age of twelve. He had been gifted with divine spiritual power. It was indeed a surprising thing that such a gifted God-man got stuck up in running a kingdom for twenty three long years. May be it was also necessary for completing the entire drill.

The moment Alavandar saw the deity and heard the soul stirring words of the dedicated mendicant he ran into the *sanctum sanctorum* like a madman, and stretching his body before *Sri Ranganatha* fell into a swoon. Alavandar accepted with joy the treasure left by his grandfather. *Sri Ranganatha.* became his. Realising Him who is the Lord of the Universe, Alavandar had no more desire to go back to his petty kingdom. He received initiation into the spiritual life from Nambi and spent his days in the service of *Sri Ranganath.* Alavandar received from Nambi the *mantra* of eight syllables which reveals the hidden treasure. Lifting the veil of delusion with the help of the *mantra*, he felt the reality of *Sri Ranganath* and worshipped Him every day with *Tulasi* leaves."

The great saint wrote four books in Sanskrit. They were *stotraratna, Siddhitraya, Agamapramanya* and *Gitarthasangraha.* All these books deal with *Vishishtadvaitavada.*

The saint had an intuition about his end and before the final end came could not contact Acharya Ramanujacharya but breathed his last only remembring him. Ramanujacharya alone could decipher the symbols with the last message left by the great saint. That is an interesting story.

According to *Cultural Heritage of India* "Yamunacharya clearly laid down the lines on which Ramanujacharya later on elaborated the system of *Visishtadvaita.*" (Vol. IV, p 173). His four treatises are popular with the *Sri Vaishnavas.* He describes the role of *Lakshmi* in God-realisation. This popular little book *Sri Chatusloki* describes the position of *Lakshmi* as the consort of *Vishnu.*

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His *Stotratna* is a poem of seventy stanzas in praise of *Vishnu*. It is an ardent praise of the doctrine of self surrender.

Yamunacharya's *Siddhitraya* is a work in three sections—*Atmasiddhi*, *Isvarasiddhi* and *Samvilsidhi* demonstrating "the nature of the individual soul, the supreme Lord, and the relation between the soul and the objects of perception." In *Samvilsidhi* Yamunacharya refutes the doctrines of *avidya* and absolute identity which play such a conspicuous part in the philosophy of Sankara.

The main contention of Yamunacharya'a philosophy is his plea "to prove the supremacy of *Vishnu*, who, he holds, is the *Mahapurusa* of the *Purusa Sukta*, the essence of the *Vedas*.

In brief the philosophy of Yamunacharya gives the following divine ideas :

The saint says, "God is the supreme Being. He is the whole of which individual souls are the parts. We are related to him as are the waves of the occan to the ocean. The universe is a transformation of God. God is its soul; the visible world is his body.

In *Stotraratna* the saint prays

Makhanatha vadanti yoasmaham

Sakalam taddhi tavoiba Madhava

Niyatam swamiti prabuddhadhirathi

Kingnu samarpayami toi

Oh Lord, *Madhava*, whatever I am, whatever I have, belong to you only. If even I get the enlightened knowledge that everything is exclusively yours then what shall I offer you?

I exclusively belong to you.

In another prayer Yamunacharya says, "God is beyond the realm of speech and mind. He is the ocean of mercy. How can we pray to him or praise him, who is worshipped and praised even by the great gods? In the ocean are drowned the high mountains and small atom. No difference between them is felt by the ocean.

"My beloved, O thou sweet one, I and me and mine all belong to Thee. What can I offer in that case?"

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Swami Prabhavananda observes: *I am Thine*: this expresses the attitude of the devotees of *Visishtadvaita*. The *Vaishnava* devotees of Bengal preach another beautiful truth: *Thou art mine*. Yamunacharya writes, "Thou art father, thou art mother, thou art son, thou art daughter. thou art dear friend, thou art *guru*, thou art the supreme soul and refuge of the whole universe."

The highest ideal, according to Yamunacharya, is to take refuge in the Lord and surrender oneself completely to him. This was the first brick on which the illustrious disciple of the saint, Acharya Ramanujacharya built the edifice of *Visishtadvaitavad*.

No doubt *Visishtadvatavad* was not introduced by either Yamunacharya or Ramanujacharya. But the whole philosophy got a scientific treatment and popularity only through their preachings and practices. It has been observed truly that "*Visishtadvaita Vedanta*, the *Vedanta*, in its aspect of qualified non-dualism, traces its origin to the period of the *Upanishads*; at least it had gained followers at the time of the composition of the *Mahabharata* being identical with the doctrine of *Pancharatna* mentioned in that poem. In the tenth century AD, however, it received greater impetus and a brighter light from the teachings of the saint Yamuna and in the eleventh century the great teacher Ramanuja, who had been influenced by Yamuna, gave it a sound philosophical basis and made it a popular religion, particularly in southern India. Yamuna and Ramanuja belong to the long time of *Vaishnavas* saints recognised in Southern India and generally known as *Alvars*. *Alvar* is a Tamil word which means "he who rules the world by his love and devotion to God."

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan observes the unique contribution of Yamunacharya: "Yamunacharya struggled hard to defend the *Vaishnava Agamas* and make out that they had the same purport as the *Vedas*."

(*Indian Philosophy*, Vol II, p 668)

In his *History of Vedanta Philosophy* (in Bengali) the learned scholar Swami Prajnananda of *Shankar Math*, Barisal, observes:

"This spirit of surrender (by Yamunacharya's philosophy) has great similarity with the *Gaudiya Vaishnava* philosophy—

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What shall I give you ? Whatever present I offer, belongs to you. Acharya Yamuna has given up everything to his Lord. The *Vaishnava* poet has accepted everything as *Narayana.* Yamunacharya's state is *tavoivahang*. The *Vaishnava* poet's state is *mamoiva tuam.*

The relation between man and God may be that like a father, mother, son, friend. All are possible. To Yamunacharya, the relation is like that of a servant of God. To him *dasya bhava* is the best."

The saint had a large number of eminent disciples. The most outstanding among them was Mahapurna. Ramanujacharya, although the ablest among the followers, and the one who completed his work, could not reach in time for initiation. They, however met each other earlier.

As the great saint's health was breaking down gradually, the disciples were getting panicky. They could feel, however, that the enlightened one was looking for somebody. His eyes were showing some eagerness. He was looking for somebody exclusively. That was Ramanuja. He was yet on his way.

Inspite of his ill health Alavandar continued his discourses. In one of his last discourses he told his disciples, "As the essence of the flower is the honey, and of the cow *Ghee,* so the substance of the three worlds is *Narayana.* By taking refuge in Him one attains the four main ends of human life—virtue, wealth, enjoyment and final beautitude."

When a disciple had put some doubts saying "*Narayana* is beyond mind and speech, how should then one serve Him ?" The saint replied, "One serves the Lord by serving His devotees. The devotee of God has no caste or race. He is the visible image of God. The best among the devotees always worship the images of *Narayana* and His devotees with steadfastness and love."

The meeting between Alavandar and Ramanuja was historic. It was accidental. It was for few moments. It was at Kanchipuram. Alavandar was on a pilgrimage to visit *Sri Varadaraja.* That day as Alavandar was returning from the holy temple along with disciples, he saw Yadavaprakash, then *Guru* of Ramanuja on his way. Yadavaprakash was walking with his hand resting on the shoulders of Ramanuja and followed by a retinue of his other disciples.

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"At the sight of Ramanuja's spiritual lustre and incomparable beauty, the venerable Yamunacharya felt intensively attracted towards him, and on enquiry, came to know that the young man was the author of that elaborated commentary on the *mantra* of *Satyam jnanam anantam Brahma* (*Brahma* is Existence, Intelligence and Infinity). Alavandar was exceedingly pleased at this, but felt very much concerned to find him living in the company of dry polemic that was Yadava and prayed to *Sri Varadaraja*."

Alavandar sang :
"I take refuge in that boon-giving diety
by a fraction of whose grace the deaf hear,
the lame move swiftly, the dumb speak, the
blind see and a barren woman becomes the
mother of a son.

O lotus-eyed One, O Lord of *Lakshmi*, do
you bring Ramanuja to your faith by bestowing
your grace upon him."

The Saint immediately grew a special facsination for Ramanuja. He was sad to find, "the gracious form which gladdens the heart of the beloved of *Vishnu* by the side of the dry hearted Yadava. Though he longed to talk with Ramanuja, he was forced to avoid him like sweet food smeared with poison. Old alike in wisdom and years, being now more than a hundred years old, the venerable Alavandar, the crest-jewel of the *Vaishanavas* consoled himself with the thought that, if Providence chose, he would one day have an opportunity of seeing Ramanuja by himself. He then returned to Srirangam."

That was the first meeting. That was the first prayer to win over the gem to his side. Both bore fruit.

People went from Kanchipuram to Srirangam to visit the ailing saint. He heard from one of them that Ramanuja had given up the discipleship of Yadavaprakash and was studying the scriptures on his own. The Saint was delighted to know that as a direction from Kanchipurna, an enlightened soul, who lived at the temple of *Ranganatha*, Ramanuja was fetching a jar

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of water daily from the *Sal* well for the Lord. Yamuna got excited.

"Then and there he composed eight hymns of salutation to the Lord. And addressing Mahapurna he said, "My child, without any delay, please bring, Ramanuja here. It is good to have him included in our group."

Mahapurna immediately left for Kanchipuram. Every moment the saint was expecting the beloved enlightened Ramanuja. But he could not wait any more. His last moment approached suddenly and with the name of *Ranganatha* he breathed his last.

Mahapurna reached Kanchipuram and met Kanchipurna at the temple of *Sri Varadaraja.* When Kanchipurna came to know the purpose of his visit he was happy. He asked him to take rest at night and wait for the morning when Ramanuja would visit the temple with his usual jar of water. Early morning both the dedicated souls set out for the well from where Ramanuja used to get water for the Lord.

They met Ramanuja on way. He was carrying the pitcher on his shoulder. It was a scene of serenity in person. Mahapurna could not resist quoting a beautiful song :

"You are by nature powerful,
magnaminous, good, guileless,
pure, gentle, compassionate, sweet,
sedate, impartial, blessed,
beholder and a nectar-occean
of all auspicious qualities."

Mahapurna met Ramanuja and paying obeisance sang another hymn :

"Salutation again and again to you
who are beyond speech and mind.
Salutation again and again to you
the only ground of speech
and mind; Salutation again and
again (to you) of infinitely.

great superhuman powers;
repeated salutations to the only

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occean of boundless mercy."

Both the songs were from Yamunacharya's *Stotraratna.* Mahapurna went on reciting fluently one after another hymns by Yamuna.

Ramanuja was spell bound. He was standing there motionless like a portrait. He wanted to know details about the beautiful hymns. And was thrilled to know that they were composed by the great Saint Yamunacharya. He asked about his health. Exerybody knew about his ailing health.

Mahapurna gave details about Yamunacharya's longing to see Ramanuja. Ramanuja was happy. He rushed to the temple, placed the pitcher of water in the temple and got ready for Srirangam.

Mahapurna could realise all these were happening due to long prayers by Yamunacharya. He sang yet another song.

"May I be born even as a worm in the family of those who are attached only to the delight of servitude to you, but let me not be born even as the four faced *Brahma* in the family of those who are otherwise disposed."

This too was a song from *Stotraratna.* Just keeping the pitcher of water in the temple Ramanuja rushed to Mahapurna and without wasting a moment wanted to leave for Srirangam.

No preparation, no information to the family. He was so eager to meet Yamunacharya.

Mahapurna never had seen such devotion to a saint by his admirer.

When they reached Srirangam there was some bad omen. The weeping willows, the stagnant river, the still branches of trees all heralded the advent of something sad.

When they reached the temple of *Sri Ranganath* they saw a big crowd. Mahapurna's heart was sinking with suspense. There must be some bad news. They asked a passer-by about the crowd, "The earth has been deprived of its most precious ornament. Mahatma Alavandar has attained the supreme abode of the Lord!"

Alavandar lived for more than one hundred years.
Ramanuja fainted. Mahapurna started wailing like a child.
Ramanuja missed the saint by seconds.

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"I find that three fingers of the saint's right hand are folded and clenched. Were they like that during his lifetime?"

"No, no. Even before the final journey, he prayed with folded hands."

Ramanuja was an enlightened soul. He could understand that the saint must have had three desires which he wanted only Ramanuja to fulfil. He knew from Mahapurna too already that he wanted to tell him something on a priority basis,

Ramanuja promised to fulfil all the last three desires of the saint. He said, "remaining always in the fold of *Vaishanavism*, I shall protect the people deluded by ignorance, bestowing upon them the five *Samskaras*, making them versed in the *Dravida Vedas* and devoted to the religion of surrender by making them devotees of *Sriman Narayana*."

Ahang Vishnumatay sthitwa
Jananajnanamohitan

Immediately one of the three clenched fingers got straight.

Then Ramanuja declared, taking into consideration all the interpretations, "I shall, for the wellbeing of the people, write the *Sri Bhasya* which will usher in good and establish the knowledge of Reality."

Sangrihitwa nikailanarthan
Tatvajnanaparang shubham
Sribhasyam cha karisyami
Janarakshnanheturna

Immediately the second clenched finger stood straight. Finally Ramanuja said, "In order to pay off the debt to that gracious Muni *Parasara*, who out of compassion wrote the gem among the *Puranas* (*Vishnu Purana*) in which he clealy lays down the nature of *Isvara*, *jivas*, the world and the way of their progress— I shall name one greatly learned *Vaishnava* after him."

The third clenched finger also stood straight. It was really an amazing incident. No doubt "all were exceedingly amazed to witness this. It was clear that this young man was going to hold the position of Alavandar in times to come".

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Alavandar was not only really a king, he was also a king among saints. In his immortal *Stotraratna* the holy man begged *Sri Hari* to give him a place at His holy feet :

> "O Hari! Pray, make me Thine own
> out of sheer grace—me who am the
> repository of a thousand iniquities,
> who am fallen into the depths of the
> terrible occean of worldly existence,
> and who in utter helplessness
> have sought refuge at the feet."
>
> (*Stotraratna*, No 48)

In another prayer he says :

> "Having in view my grandfather, the Self
> possessed Nathamuni, who is the noblest
> example of pure and guileless love for
> The lotus feet—pray, bestow on me Thy
> grace, regardless of my own conduct."
>
> (*Stotraratna*, No 65)

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SRI RAMANUJACHARYA

(1017 AD—1137 AD)

One of the greatest *Acharyas* of whole of India Bhagwan Sri Ramanuja was born in 1017 AD after long prayers by Keshavacharya and Kantimati, the two incarnations of devotion. Both had been deeply religious. They had been offering prayers to Lord Parthasarathy to bless them with a son. Keshavacharya was known for his learning and deep devotion. He knew all the Vedas by heart and was a Brahmin of very high order. He was sad. He would have no kin to offer *tarpan* to the forefathers, unless he had a son. The wife was equally sad. Both offered prayers most sincerely before Parthasarathy.

A strange thing happened. The learned Brahmin had an intuition. He saw the bright image of Parthasarathy was standing before him. He was telling him with an ever fascinating smile that he was extremely satisfied with his prayers. "Do not worry, very soon you will have a son who will be a world known preceptor". So saying the figure vanished. The learned Brahmin was excited. He knew this promise by Parthasarathy would never go wrong. It must be honoured by the kind God.

Keshabacharya immediately narrated the story to his wife who was equally happy. So when the child was born on an auspicious day both knew that it was the blessing of Lord and that the newly born was going to be preceptor of a new age. They both reared him up in the same traditional background of learning, devotion and divine enlightenment. Ramanuja was one of the greatest of the Saints during the post Buddha period, next to or at par with Bhagwan Sankaracharya and Mahamati Buddha.

The *Vaishnavas* consider him the greatest of the saints. He revived the *Vishnu* upasana with great zeal and by dint of his deep learning and conviction of faith propounded his faith among the masses for their salvation. He propounded a new system of *Vishistadvaitavad* as against *Advaitavad* by

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Sankaracharya. It had a far reaching effect and the philosophy of Ramanuja played the most important role as the forerunner to the *Bhakti* movement that flooded whole of India four hundred years later. It will not be much to say that he played the role of so to say a *guru* to great later—Saints like Srikrishna Chaitanya, Vallabhacharya or Madhvacharya and the rest. That devotion to God was the only way to salvation was distinctly a different approach altogether. No bookish learning or *Vedic* rituals were necessary to have God realisation. It was not an easy matter to establish the theory against the age old traditional ritualistic *Vedic* concepts.

At the age of sixteen Ramanuja was married to Rakshambal, a young girl of paragon beauty. It is said that there was a community festival for over a week. The father Asuri Keshavacharya and mother Kantimati were exceedingly happy. But it was perhaps not meant to last long because within a month of the auspicious ceremony Keshavacharya passed away. The family did not like to stay at Sriperumbudur which became unbearable for both the mother and the son. So they left for Kanchipuram, the ancient holy city.

Yadavaprakash was the most learned man of the city. He was an undisputed authority on *Vedanta*. Young Ramanuja embraced his discipleship. The young talented Saint Scholar immediately made a mark in the academic circles. Very soon he became the most brilliant student of Yadavaprakash. *Yadaviya Siddhanta* was the most well talked treatise on *Vedanta*. He believed like Sankaracharya in Advaita philosophy. He would not accept God with a form but unlike the latter he did not accept *Virat* as *Maya* or unreal appearance. He was convinced that "the universe was not as totally insignificant. It is one kind of God's own form which is ever changeful".

Right from the beginning, Ramanuja did not like the ideas of his preceptor. He was not convinced by his arguments. Many a time Ramanuja would mentally resist the interpretations by the Guru although they were received with deep veneration by the rest. Ramanuja was not a book worm. He had to be convinced intellectually. They had to convey the message not only from their conviction but also from their self realisation. Being one with tremendous love for God, he

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could not accept even a simile which was not to his liking about the Almighty. Once it so happened that all the students had left the *Chatuspati*, (a Sanskrit College) the favourite Ramanuja was staying back to serve the Guru. As he was doing so, a fellow disciple wanted clarification to some expression in the *Chandogya* Upanishad. The word could be interpreted in different senses as the Sanskrit words many times carry more than one meaning. It was a description of God. The eyes were being described. The sentence was *tasya yatha kapyasam pundarikame vamakshini*. Now, even Sankaracharya explained *kapyasam* as nates of a monkey. So Yadavaprakash described the two eyes of God as "The two eyes of that Golden *Purusha* are like two lotuses which are red like the nates of a monkey" Ramanuja had a tender heart. He could not appreciate the simile. It was a vulgar one to his soft mind. As he was massaging the *Guru*, drops of warm tears touched the Guru's body. He was surprised. What could provoke the young disciple to shed tears ? He immediately asked him the reason.

Ramanuja said, "Revered Sir, I have been sorely grieved to hear such an unbecoming explanation from a noble soul like you. How sinful it is to compare with the posterior of a monkey the eyes of the Supreme God head—who is endowed with all gracious qualities, who is the repository of all the beauty of the universe. From the mouth of a wise person like you I never expected this". Yadavaprakash could hardly appreciate the tenderness of the disciple's deep feeling and love for the divinity. He was a proud book worm and full of vanity. Instaed of consoling the young one for his sadness, he started rebuking him for his"aud acity". He challenged his young disciple, "If you do not like my interpretation, replace it by a better one, can you ?".

"Yes Sir, if you bless me I can try".

"You want to correct Sankaracharya ? You want to surpass Sankaracharya ?".

"With your blessings I submit my interpretaion. Should I ?".

The teacher was simply fuming.

Ramanuja said, "Instead of deriving the meaning of the nates of a monkey from the word *kapyasam*, we can construe

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it as follows : *Kam jalam pibatiti—kapih, surya* : he who drinks water, that is, the sun: and the verbal root as being indicative of blossoming, the word *asa* may well mean *blossomed.* In this way the entire word *kapyasam* comes to mean 'blossomed by the sun'. So that part of the *mantra* will mean, 'The eyes of that *purusha* within the golden solar orb are as lovely as the lotuses blossomed by the rays of the sun."

Guru was an *Advaiti.* He was convinced that disciple was a believer in dualism, *Dvaita.* His affection for Ramanuja dwindled. He saw the keen power of argument which was not only forceful, but was logically sound. He was convinced the young budding scholar would certainly surpass him soon. He felt terribly jealous of him. The poison of bitterness in the teacher made him hate the young saint. He wanted to do away with him.

This was only the beginning. Infact the teacher should have felt proud of his disciple's performance. But his conception of divinity was restricted to studies and he could hardly say anything from self realised knowledge. A really learned scholar will very much welcome a defeat from either his son or a disciple. It is a famous saying in Sanskrit: *sarbatra jayam ichhet tu, putrat sisyat parajayam.* You must wish a victory everywhere but a defeat from a son or disciple is always welcome. Yadavaprakash had a different mind. So there was another tussle. This time it was centring round the description of the *Brahmin.*

Satyam jnanam anantam Brahma. This is a description of God in *Taittariya Upanishad.*

The Guru said, "*Brahman* is Truth, Intelligence and Infinitude".

Ramanuja said, "No. Brahman is endowed with the quality of truth, is not endowed with untruth; intelligence is His attribute, not nescience. He is infinite, i.e. not finite. He is endowed with the qualities of truth, intelligence and infinitude. It is by no means to hold that all these qualities are He Himself. These are His but not He, as the body is mine, I am not the body".

This was the limit. So far the teacher had been keeping his patience. Now was his turn perhaps to lose temper.

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"You think you know more than Sankaracharya ? Nop revious *acharya* ever gave such interpretations".

Perhaps he was not wrong either. The teachers' only mistake was that he could not recognise the new *acharya*:

Ramanuja was hurt. He did not like to exhibit his knowledge. He was an incarnation of humility and modesty. How could he challenge those great sages and seers ? He was only misunderstood by his *acharya*. How could he explain that he did not accept each and everything that these saints observed. He had his original ideas. This was the result of self realised knowledge. He could not keep silent when his teacher was uttering any thing to which he could not agree.

Yadavaprakash, somehow, was convinced that this was not an ordinary student. He would found his own school and would also spread an altogether different interpretation of *Vedanta*. He was an intelligent man. After all he was the preceptor of Ramanuja. So he started discouraging Ramanuja from entering into any dispute with him.

The other students would enjoy the arguments. They too could feel clearly that there were reasons in the arguments of Ramanuja. He sounded more scientific in approach.

Yadavaprakash was not only jealous of Ramanuja, but was afraid of his disciple. He felt the *Advaita* philosophy as preached and practised by sages and seers for all these years would be in jeopardy. This young man by his forceful arguments would definitely convert them to dualism.

It was out of jealousy, malice, anger and strong begotry that Yadavaprakash decided to kill Ramanuja. He disclosed this plan to his selected disciples who were more or less helpless. The preceptor organised a pilgrimage with all his disciples. It was decided that when they reach a dense jungle they would kill Ramanuja and return home. People would think the pilgrim must have been killed by some wild animal. At least that was the intention of Yadavaprakash.

They all started happily for a pilgrimage. Ramanuja had no iota of doubt about the evil intentions of a mean person who happened to be his spiritual preceptor. How could such a noble heart have any inkling of about his *Guru's* intentions? God always protects his devotees. He has to, because He has promised so in the Holy Scriptures.

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When a near relation of Ramanuja, Govinda, was also requested to accompany the team, the unwise *Guru* could hardly realise that the whole plan was going to be upset by Govinda. Govinda came to know about the whole plan.

A gleaning from the original biography will throw some light on the matter which sounds really more or less unbelivable otherwise. The learned biographer records : "One day when Ramanuja and Govinda happend to go alone by themselves to some wayside tank for washing their feet, Govinda communicated to him all that he knew of the evil designs of their preceptor. He made it clear to his cousin that on the pretext of going on a pilgrimage, this band of rogues had resolved to murder him and said, 'These villains will very soon kill you in this desolate forest. Therefore, leave them and hide yourself somewhere'. So saying, he took leave of him and joined the other disciples. When on enquiry Yadavaprakash discovered that Ramanuja was not to be found in the group of disciples, all busied themselves in searching him out. But none found a trace of him in that deep and lonely forest. They began to call aloud his name in all directions; but there was no response. At last, taking it for granted that Ramanuja must have been killed by some wild animal, they were well pleased. But knowing Govinda to be his relation, they began to show outwardly sermons on the evanescence of life and consoled Govinda with the words, "None is none's. Thus malice made Yadavaprakash the preceptor into something worse than a beast".

Ramanuja was startled. First he could not believe Govinda. But from the eyes of his cousin and his eagerness to leave the team immediately he could feel that great danger to his life was awaiting him. So he had to rush.

Ramanuja did not know where to go. He just started walking very fast. Without break he walked miles after miles in the dense jungle. Suddenly he fainted of fatigue. He was in that state for quite some time. When he woke up he suddenly felt a unique bliss. The whole body was completely fresh. There was no sign of any fatigue.

After a wash when he was going to offer his prayers of thanks particularly that he got rid of the intrigue of Yadavaprakash, he found to his surprise two human beings walking to

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his direction. He was a bit surprised. Both appeared before him and the lady asked him "Who are you? How have you come to this dense jungle?".

From their appearance Ramanuja could understand it was a fowler couple.

Ramanuja gave his introduction in brief and also expressed his helplessness in the dense forest, where it is so difficult to find out one's way even during the broad day light.

"Yes my child", said the kind lady. This is very true. We are coming from the Vindhyas. We are on a pilgrimage to Rameshwaram and Kanchipuram. Do not worry, you may accompany us. We know the way.

The "tall red-eyed fowler" said, "Let us quickly cover this forest region and find our resting place for the night on the bank of broad Subterra near river which flows by not very far from here".

They quickly walked for about an hour and reached the bank of a river. They found a resting place and all the three retired for the day.

It was already dark. The lady was feeling very thirsty. She asked for water. The fowler said, "you will have it only in the morning. Let us wait for a short while. There is a good well nearby. I shall get you water from there in the morning tomorrow."

Next morning all the three got up at dawn and started their journey after a wash and prayers.

It is always good to trek when the day is young. They came near a beautiful well. Ramanuja knew that the kind fowler lady was so thirsty. He hurried to fetch handful of water. The lady was very happy. She asked for more. It was repeated thrice but the thirsty lady asked for more. Ramanuja thought he should go down the well steps and fetch more water. But where had the fowler couple gone? They disappeared within the twinkling of an eye. They just vanished. Even after a thorough search Ramanuja could not trace them out.

But what is this? Very well known sights around him surprised him. There was the dome of the temple. There must be a city nearby. People started walking as the day was approaching.

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"What is this city?" Ramanuja could not check his curiosity. He asked a passer by, "Do you know the name of the town?".

"Are you just descending from the heavens? It is a familiar face. Do you not know this is the famous city of Kanchipuram? Are you not a disciple of Yadavaprakash? You look like the one I saw in his school."

The well was a very sacred spot where thousands of pilgrims throng to touch its water which has medicinal values too. "Its water assuages all kinds of misery pertaining to the flesh".

The passer by too left him. So who were the fowler couple? They must have been the dwelling deities of his heart. They must have been *Lakshmi-Narayana* who must have appeared before him. In the dense jungle he was only meditating on both. His heart was overwhelmed with emotion.

Ramanuja with folded hands recited the *mulmantra* offering prayers to *Narayan*.

Namo Brahmanyadevaya
Gobrabmanahitaya
Jagaddhitaya Krishnaya
Govindaya namo namah

Again and again I salute that Brahmanyadeva that Govinda, that Krishna, who is the doer of good unto the cows and the holy ones and the universe at large.

Ramanuja repeated the holy name thousands of times with greater vigour and new zeal. Now he was convinced that the Lord had taken charge of protecting him. Otherwise how could Govinda, his cousin, know of the heinous intentions of his *Guru* to kill him? How could he come to the dense jungle? And how could he reach Kanchipuram so quickly without covering the hazardous long route. He was particulary happy that *Narayanee* had taken water out of his hand and that too not once-thrice. His heart was thrilled. Ramanuja was now an enlightened soul. Now he recalled how blissful he felt in the company of the fowler couple although he was so tired and fainted just before their appearance.

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Yadavaprakash suddenly discovered that Ramanuja was missing. He was glad that the intellectual rival had been removed in the natural very course. He was convinced that some wild beast must have killed Ramanuja. He was happy that his main intention for this arranged pilgrimage bore fruit before he had anticipated.

He called all his disciples, particularly Govinda, the cousin of Ramanuja, and held a pretentious condolence meeting. He shed a lot of crocodile tears just to convince Govinda that he was mortally wounded at the premature demise of Ramanuja. Similarly some other disciples, who were equally jealous of Ramanuja whose, spiritual and academic achievements had definitely surpassed all of them put together, also joined their *Guru* and decribed the "departed soul's" brilliance in all fields.

Govinda had to sit quietly as a silent spectator. The news was restricted to the forest only. There was no means of communication. They also rehearsed how to break the 'sad' news before the unfortunate mother. The unpalatable task was assigned to Govinda, nephew of Kantimati. Govinda was the son of Diptimati, Kantimati's real sister.

Ramanuja was now in all joy. He would not like to leave the holy spot. He sat there near the famous well in the *Sal* forest adjacent to Kanchipuram.

Ramanuja thought in his heart of hearts the divine couple who had been so close to him, who unfolded their grace and mercy on their own must appear before him again. This secret desire made him repeat the glory of Narayana and he again sat for a deep meditation uttering the hymn from *Srimad Bhagavatam*

Krishnaya Vasudevaya Devakinandanaya Cha
Nandagopakumaraya Govindaya namo namah

Again and again do I salute *Krishna*, *Vasudeva* who is the son of Devaki and the darling of Nanda and who is *Govinda*.

Namah Pankajanabhaya, namah Pankajamalinay
Namah Pankajanetraya namaste Pankajangghreya

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I salute the One of lotus navel; I salute the One wearing the lotus garland; I salute the One of lotus eyes; I salute the One of lotus feet.

At home Kantimati had stopped taking any food. The daughter in law had left for her parents. The maid servant went to her village. Except the fruits and roots offered to *Narayana*, she would not touch any food. She would not cook any food either. She had lost her sleep. She almost forgot her prayers too. She would be thinking only of the son, Ramanuja who had gone with his *Guru* to pilgrimage. The only consolation with the pious widow was that Diptimati's son Govinda, her nephew was also there to give constant company to the cousin. Govinda was a bright fellow and must take care of Ramanuja.

All mothers of the world have an intuition about their children's enhancing dangers. Such a great devoted lady Kantimati had been no exception. She left her food and sleep in anticipation of the enhancing danger to the son's life. She did not know anything about the plot. The son was at a distance that would take anybody six months to reach. And yet she felt restless.

Ramanuja's meditation broke. Three ladies came to have water from the well. Ramanuja knew he was enlightened. The three signs—"tears, perspiration and tremor"—of God realisation were there. Now the moment he uttered the name of *Narayana* all the three appeared there.

He left for Kanchipuram. Was it not a telepathy? Was it not the strong will-force of the pious mother Kantimati that brought Ramanuja back home much before the schedule?

The mother was stunned. She would not have been so happy even if *Narayana* had appeared before her. She was so long shedding tears. She added to that. But they were completely different. They were tears of joy.

"How is it you have come so suddenly my darling? Did you not go to the pilgrimage finally? Did you change your mind on way? Where is the party? Endless questions of a happy mother thrilled Ramanuja who was equally happy on his happy return. The mother blessed the saint child who fell at her feet.

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Ramanuja gave the details of his journey, the heinous plot of his Guru Yadavaprakash, the kindness of the fowler couple and his short cut return.

The mother was flabbergusted. He also narrated how he had the great good fortune to offer water to the consort of Narayana and she was kind to him like his mother.

Kantimati understood now how the son returned home so quickly. Otherwise it would have taken him at least six months only to return from the holy pilgrimage. She was sad for Yadavaprakash. She was grateful to her nephew Govinda for unearthing whole plot and finally saving him. Of course she expressed her gratitude to the deity *Narayana* who, by his supreme grace had been protecting her son at every step.

When joy comes, it simply comes in torrents. Soon there was a knock at the door and it was Diptimati, Govinda's mother, who came all of a sudden. The kind sister heard all about Kantimati's long fasts and her sleepless nights and restless days. So she came to console the kind hearted along with her daughter in law. She brought the maid servant too. When she started consoling Kantimati, Ramanuja suddenly appeared there from the inner apartment. Diptimati could not believe her eyes. How could, of all persons, her nephew be present there? She knew both her son and nephew. Once they took a decision they must fulfil them. They were not to change their mind so quickly.

She too heard the whole story. She felt proud of her son who like a hero saved the cousin out of an imminent danger. Obviously there was nothing at home. No fuel, no provision. So the maid servant was sent to collect all these items.

Kantimati must feed all in a befitting manner. Even *Narayana* was not offered any cooked food all these days. To add to their joy the Saintly Kanchipurna too joined them. He came to know about his return from some passer by. Ramanuja would not allow him to go home without joining them in the joyous lunch.

The dark sadness that was hovering over the hut for all these days, it seemed, was over. After quite some time the Ramanuja house hummed with joy. There was a new of spiritual life.

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Narayana smiled in the temple corner. It was all his fun.

The jealous Yadavaprakash had not the slightest idea of the adventure of his young disciple. When the ill hearted was happily launching a retreat—for his main purpose, as he knew, was over, he knew Ramanuja was killed—he had no intention to prolong the pilgrimage. So he was returning with his party. Govinda was slightly worried about his cousin. He had no information about Ramanuja's return. He only left him in a dense jungle, that too in the opposite direction for obvious reasons. Now his heart was murmuring. "Will I be able to see him safe and sound?"

Yadavaprakash planned his meeting with Ramanuja's mother. He had already directed Govinda to break the news and prepare the ground for him to give an explanation. What could he do? After all everything was in the hands of Destiny.

That everything was really in the hands of Destiny could be realised by the crooked preceptor when he reached Kanchipuram. He was not only stunned, he was mentally frightened. Except a living God none else could do the miracle. After all the man was also not unlettered. Yadavaprakash returned home with all his disciples except Govinda in due course. Ramanuja asked Kantimati and her sister not to tell anybody about his *Guru's* plot to kill him. The Guru himself did not know that Ramanuja had any inkling of doubt about his Guru's demeanour.

After leaving Ramanuja in the dense forest Govinda had accompanied the team to Varanasi where he was fortunate enough to get a *Banalinga* (around symbol of Shiva) which was a sign of his spiritual progress. Even Yadavaprakash commended this achievement. So the Guru directed him to devote his prayers to Shiva. He went to Kalabasti. Govinda was happy. He liked the place so much that he had no mind to leave that holy place. He stayed back at Kalabasti spending his time in workshiping the *Banalinga.*

The mother Diptimati, herself a deeply religious lady was not sad. She welcomed this spiritual pursuit of her son.

Yadavaprakash started his college again. He was mentally firghtened of Ramanuja in person. He first thought it was

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either a halucination or the ghost of his disciple. How could he come here? He was dead long back!

Ramanuja bowed before his teacher and expressed his desire once again to study under him.

Yadavaprakash welcomed him. "My child, from today you should come to study with me".

Except the mother and the son, none knew about the evil design of Yadava in whole of Kanchipuram.

It so happened that the great saint philospher Yamunacharya came to visit Kanchipuram. After paying his obeisance to Sri Varadaraju he was returning home. On way he saw Yadavaprakash with his disciples, led by Ramanuja. By that time Ramanuja's commentary on the *mantra Satyam Jnanam anantam Brahma* that is, *Brahman* is Existence, Intelligence and Infinite, was quite popular with the *elite*. He had a great liking for Ramanuja at the first sight. But he had his doubts whether in the presence and company of Yadavaprakash he would be able to sprout and spread properly. Although he did not know the plot of Yadavaprakash to kill Ramanuja, a great saint that he was, he had an intuition which was clearly indicating that constant company of this 'dry' man without much devotion might lead Ramanuja no where. As a kind born teacher and preceptor he had developed a filial affection for the budding saint and he made prayer to the Lord Varadaraja. He wrote a special prayer on the occasion.

I take refuge in that boon-giving Deity
by a fraction of whose grace the deaf
hear, the lame move swiftly,
the dumb speak, the blind see and a barren woman
becomes the mother of a son
Oh Lotus eyed One, O Lord of Laskhmi
do you bring Ramanuja to your
faith by bestowing your
grace upon him!

The prayer bore fruit. Ramanuja later joined Yamunacharya but not before his demise.

Yamuna wanted to talk to Ramanuja but desisted from doing so. "Though he longed to talk to Ramanuja, he was

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forced to avoid him like sweet food smeared with poison. Old alike in wisdom and years, being now more than one hundred years old, the venerable Alavandar, the crest-jewel of the *Vaishnavas* consoled himself with the thought that if providence chose, he would one day have an opportunity of seeing Ramanuja by himself". The wise saint left for Srirangam.

It is said that besides being known as a scholar in *Vedanta*, Yadavaprakash was known also for his skill in magic. As the princess of Kanchipuram fell under the spell of some evil spirit this spiritual pundit was called by the King. Ojhas or exorcists were sent for from different parts of the country but they were of no use. Then the Vedanta expert Yadavaprakash was called. At his very sight the evil spirit that was casting its spell on the princess said "Ah Yadavaprakash your *mantras* will be of no avail here. You are wasting your pains. Go back home".

But Yadavaprakash was a hard nut. He would simply not leave the place. He started uttering other *mantras*. The spirit through the mouth of the princess said, "if you are resolved that I should be driven off from this shine of the body of the princess, so tender and delightful to touch, then bring here your youngest disciple, the blessed Ramanuja, whose arms reach down to his knees, who has broad forehead and large eyes, who is the pleasure of the Goddess of genius and the choicest blossom in the garden of youth. As the thick darkness of the clouded new moon light is removed at sunrise, so at the advent of that great soul I too shall be driven away, otherwise not".

Ramaunja was brought. A strange thing took place. The princess immediately changed her voice. She started imploring the young Saint to place his blessed feet on her head.

At the earnest request of the King Ramanuja did so.

"Will you now leave the princess?" asked the Saint.

"Yes I do and as a sign of my leaving the princess I shall break a branch of the nearby banyan tree."

That did happen. The huge trunk of the nearby tree broke down,

The princess was alright. She felt embrassed in the crowd and was led to her apartment.

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Ramanuja's respect in the whole of Kanchipuram went high when the King worshipped his feet in gratitude. The whole town came to know about his intrinsic greatness. He became a spiritual hero in the whole of Chola Kingdom.

Yadavaprakash become jealous of Ramanuja for a second time. Every time Ramanuja advanced his argument and opposed his interpretation. He would tell him to quit his college.

This time Ramanuja left Yadava for good.

Ramanuja was sad. He was sad because he did not like the demeanour of his *Guru*. After all he was a learned man and should not have behaved so rudely with him. He only wanted clarification of his ideas. He did not like to show off his knowledge. He was himself a very humble and obedient disciple and never wanted to surpass his *Guru*, and yet he was turned out by Yadavaprakash simply because he did not agree with Ramanuja.

Ramanuja did not know the real reason. The real reason was sheer jealousy of Yadavaprakash. He could anticipate with his vast experience that this learned disciple was going to surpass him very soon. At every stage he wanted to pull him down before the other disciples. So Ramanuja stopped going to Yadava's house. As he was studying alone in his house, one day he suddenly found Kanchipurna at his gate.

Kanchipurna was a very noble soul. Right from his childhood he was dedicated to the great deity of *Sri Varadaraja*. He left everything and had no attachment. He considered *Sri Varadaraja* as his everything and he would spend all his time in worshipping him. He was known as a very pious simple and honest person throughout the whole of the city. In fact the people of the city considered it a good omen to have his *darshan*. They thought all their desires would be fulfilled just at the sight of this noble man. He was a very cheerful person always deeply absorbed in divine thoughts. He came on his own to Ramanuja. This was not expected. But he came at the right moment. The young saint was very much disappointed and although he was studying some books he was having a great internal storm in his heart and a deep anxiety in his mind. Looking at Kanchipurna, Ramanuja forgot all his difficulties and received him with his heart and

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soul. He knew that here was the purest soul in the whole city and he immediately fell at his feet. But the saint would not allow him to touch his feet since Ramanuja was a *Brahamin* and he a *Shudra*.

To Ramanuja a divine man, a pure soul was higher than a *Brhamin* and he did not believe in caste or creed. He wanted repeatedly Kanchipurna to make him his disciple to which the latter declined every time.

Kanchipurna used to get the best of flowers and used to arrange sandal wood, incense, fruits and sweets. He would than offer his prayers and meditate on God for hours together. He could realise the anxiety of Ramanuja. He wanted to give him some solace. But being fully convinced that he was not a person to become his *Guru* he consoled him by saying that he would be happy if Ramanuja carried a pitcher of water every day for the holy shrine. This was also a very noble gesture. Kanchipurna knew that Ramanuja was not only a Brahmin but a very learned person. He believed firmly that being a Shudra and a person not much educated was not suited to be a spiritual guide to saint by person like Ramanuja. He wanted to be a spared of the request of taking of the Preceptorship of the young Brahmin.

To this Ramanuja said that learning was not everything. Learning must be associated with humility. A learned person must not be insolent, he must have the meekness and respect for the rest and he said that he considered *Kanchipurna* must be more suitable than many brahmins to be his Guru. Now that he asked him to carry a pitcher of water every day for Sri Varadarraja, Ramanuja was very happy. He thought it was a very pious duty and by this he would be serving the Temple God regularly.

He wanted to be associated with the Saint and the temple. This was an extremely nice opportunity and he did not like to miss it. He readily agreed. He wanted to give some relief to the beloved Kanchipurna for whom carrying a heavy pitcher of water was not a very easy daily drill.

As he mixedup with Kanchipurna more and more intimately, the real mystery of this great soul, got unfolded before the young saint. And he started having more and more regard for him.

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Ramanuja thought through Kanchipurna he was coming nearer Sri Varadaraja too. Who was Sri Varadaraja?

Sri Varadaraya—was an *incarnation of Vishnu.* In fact Lord *Vishnu* is worshipped in Kanchipuram as *Sri Varadaraja.* He descends from *Vaikuntha*, the eternal home of the Lord.

So Kanchipurna was respected bp all the followers of Lord Vishnu as the symbol of true Vaishavism, an ideal devotee and spiritually higher than many Brahmins. At least the learned Saint Ramanuja used to say that in public. His respect for Kanchipurana was genuinely as high as it should be for a preceptor.

Like all other contemporary men of letters Yadavaprakash with his vanity for learning and high birth did not have much respect for him. They considered him to be mad. There was a reason for it. These followers of *Advaita* philosophy did not believe in idolatry. They did not attach much importance to Kanchipurna's whole hearted attention to the deity whom he served like a living idol. But Brahmins in whole of Kanchipuram in general had a very high regard for the simple devotee of *Vishnu.*

When Kanchipurna gave Ramanuja the task of bathing the deity of *Narayana*, the young saint thought it was a great honour as high as being appointed as a chief priest. But this was only an apprenticeship. The main assignment was yet to come. This was more or less a preparation for the same.

Yamunacharya had been the most learned saint of the age. He had an intuition that Ramanuja would be the only befitting successor to him both intellectually and spiritually. He could not talk to him in the presence of Yadavaprakash for whom he had scanty regard.

Yamunacharya had been thinking of transferring and transmitting all his spiritual power to this young saint. But he could not find a suitable occasion or opportunity to do so. He had aleady crossed a hundred years and was not to live long. He would pray for Ramanuja everyday. He would like him to get rid of the clutch of the dry *pundit* who had not achievement spiritually. All he was proud of was only bookish knowledge. He was a true *Vaishnava* and he wanted Ramanuja to be an ardent worshipper of Sri *Vishnu.* He knew the young saint would be the most effective successor to shoulder the

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heavy responsibility of spreading the message of *Vaishnavism*. His famous *Stotraratna*, composed in praise of his *Guru* Nathamuni, are real gems.

His health was failing and he could feel that his days were numbered. So he asked one of the trusted disciples to reach Kanchipuram and bring Ramanuja in person. Mahapurna went there. He first went to the temple of *Sri Varadoraja*, paid his homage and met the saintly Kanchipurna. It took Mohapurna four days to reach Kanchipuram from Srirangam on foot. Meanwhile the great Saint Yamunacharya passed away with full consciousness. He had asked his disciples to sing hymns to the glory of Lord *Vishnu*. Some disciples were playing on the flute. The saint himself sat in *Padmasana* and sat in meditation. Suddenly he fell down. Many loyal disciples fainted in grief.

Ramanuja had already started for Srirangam. He was keen to meet Yamunacharya for quite some time. Ever since he saw him at Yadavaprakash's place he could somehow feel that here was the most learned saintly person who could give him real knowledge and spiritual guideline. It was a coincidence that Mahapurna had come to take him. Ramanuja was worried lest he missed his chance to have the last *darshan* of the saint. He knew he had message to give him to carry out. He had that much of intuition.

Both were hurrying. Ramanuja was praying too. Some how he could realise that Yamunacharya was a person very near his heart. He knew that since long he was only apprehending a danger of missing the last meeting with the saint.

When one apprehends a danger and tries to avoid it, generally the same turns imminent. The same thing was true in this case too. Inspite of their eager desire and sincerest efforts both missed the saint. He had just passed away. Disciples were in grief. But they saw a peculiar thing. Ramanuja was so much devoted to Yamunacharya that he wrote "May I be born even as a worm in the family of those who are attached only to the delight of servitude to you, but let me not be born even as the four-faced *Brahma* in the family of those who are otherwise dispersed".

Ramanuja was stunned to see the body. He did not waste even a minute to reach Yamunacharya. He could not wait

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even to inform his family about his departure for Srirangam.

Mahapurna, the devoted disciple fainted at the feet of the departed. Ramanuja stood silently in tears.

But there was a message for Ramanuja—the last message. Only Ramanuja could understand that.

"I find that the three fingers of the Maharshi's right hand are folded and clenched. Were they like that during his life time"?

"No. They were always straight".

The saint had three things to be done by Ramaunja. That was the last wish of the departed one.

Ramanuja said,

Ahang Vishnumatay Sthitwa
Jananajuana mohitan

Ramanuja promised, "Remaining always in the fold of *Vaishnanism* I shall protect the people deluded by ignorance, bestowing upon them the five *sanskaras*, making them versed in the *Dravida Vedas* and devoted to the religion of surrender to *Narayana*.

It was like a miracle. As soon as Ramanuja uttered this promise, one of the fingers of Yamunacharya became straight.

Ramanuja then uttered the second promise. "Taking into consideration all the interpretations, I shall for the wellbeing of the people, write the *Sri Bhasya* which will usher in good and establish the knowledge of Reality". To the surprise of all the second finger stood straight.

Then Ramanuja came out with his third promise. He said, "In order to pay off the debt to that gracious Muni Parasara, who out of compassion wrote the gem among the *Puranas* (*Vishnu Puran*) in which he clearly lays down the nature of *Iswaras*, *Jeevas*, the world and the way of their progress—I shall name one greatly learned Vaishnava after him".

Immediately the third finger stood straight. The huge crowd got stunned.

It was a clear indication that soon this young saint would take charge of the departed saint's works.

Ramanuja left Srirangam immediately after the funeral of Yamunacharya. He did not even visit the shrine of Sri

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Ranganatha. He was a sensitive person and felt hurt that inspite of his best efforts he could not see the great Yamunacharya only because of the unkindly deed of the divinity. Otherwise why should he be denied of the rare opportunity, particularly when both of them—Yamuna and he—wanted to meet each other? Soon he returned to Kanchipuram.

The long aspiration had been nept in the bud. He longed for long to learn the holy scriptures at the feet of Yamunacharya. Now that he too was no more, Ramanuja did not like to open his heart to anybody.

The only person who could give him some solace was the ever cheerful Kanchipurna.

Grief, solitude, suffering always brings a man nearer to God because it is only in suffering that one finds none to share the sorrow. So Ramanuja's grief-stricken mind longed for an intellectual and spiritual *Guru*. He was doubtly sad that he could not meet Yamunacharya who had a last message for him. That he had remembered Ramanuja during his last moments with three desires was also confirmed by his three promises to which three fingers immediately reacted.

Ramanuja, by now, knew who he was and what was his purpose. His miraculous escape from the murderous plot of Yadavaprakash, the miracle before the princess of Kanchipuram and now the finger and three vows made it clear that he was not an ordinary person and that he had some message to spread. Now he could not go back either. He was promise-bound before the dead body of a saintly person like Yamunacharya. His whole mind was swinging between light and darkness, hope and despair. And to add to his miseries the loving mother Kantimati died suddenly. Govinda, his cousin, had already become a *Sannyasi*.

Except his wife Rakshakambal, who was a devoted consort Ramanuja had no attachment left. Although a devoted wife, Rakshakambal did not like the philosophical bent of mind of her husband. No wife will like it. Women throughout the world have a propensity to build a nest each. They have a keen sense of possessiveness. Which woman, for that matter, would welcome the idea of her husband leading a mendicant's life? She thought she was being neglected.

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Now the indifference had increased. She felt sad. There must be some reason. She did not know the details. Her responsibility at home had also increased. She had to look after everything in the house. She had to hide all her sadness only to herself. Great men, leaders, artists and litterateurs throughout the world, have been eulogised, but great sacrifice, of those unfortunate life companions who help in ths making of these great minds and their roles in unfolding their genius by relieving them of daily routine works—have yet to be recorded in history.

Rakshakambal was no exception.

An interesting event took place with Kanchipurna which left a deep imprint in the sensitive mind of the Saint. His whole attitude to religion and higher values in life were built on the foundation of one thing—a very tender thing. That was human love. Dignity for that deep devotion was always higher than pretentions rituals or bookish knowledge. To him every heart had been the citadel of God. So when due to circumstances, his ideal would be preceptor whom he designated as his Guru himself denied him of that rare privilege, he shook off the whole time honoured custom based rigid caste system. Here was perhaps the most significant contribution of Ramanuja.

The most important contribution of Ramanujacharya in the spiritual life in the country was his opposition in mind and action against caste system. He struck a death knell to the age-old caste system. He was a great scholar, a learned God-man, also himself a Brahmin of the highest order. He first felt the pinch of caste system so pathetically when his most favourite spiritual friend Kanchipurna refused to initiate him. He simply would not allow him to serve him because Ramanuja was a Brahmin and Kanchpurna a *Shudra*, comparatively a lower caste.

Ramanuja felt strongly that mere accidental birth should not be the only criterion for anybody to be ranked higher or lower in spiritual status. It should be guided by one's achievement in spiritual pursuit. He was convinced that Kanchipurna was a learned man with deep spiritual experience and achievement. He was definitely qualified to initiate anybody.

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He wanted to learn *Vedanta* at his feet. He wanted to have him as his friend, philosopher and spiritual guide. What pained him more was the opposition to his earnest request even by Kanchipurna. Time and again the latter would remind him that being a *Shudra* he could not initiate the young *Brahmin* and that he could not allow him to serve him either.

There was nothing more disturbing to him than the ill evils of caste system.

Here is a detailed story about the hide and seek game that the young Saint and his much-respected learned devotee of God Kanchipurn used to have. It is from his original biography:

Ramanuja spent most of his time in the company of Kanchipurna. His face was ever serious, his mind unhappy. Seeing his plight, Kanchipurna once told him, "My child, be not afflicted in mind. Be devoted to Sri Varadaraja. Continue to serve Him, as you have been doing, by fetching water for His worship. By His grace great good will follow. When the mission of Alavandar was over, he attained eternal peace at the lotus feet of *Sri Vishnu*. Now exert yourself to fulfil what you promised before him".

"Please make me your disciple", Ramanuja supplicated. "Allow me to be at peace in the shadow of your feet". So saying, he prostrated himself on the ground.

"Don't you be so restless," said Kanchipurna picking him up. "You are a *Brahmana*. I am a Shudra. A *Shudra* has no authority to initiate a *Brahmana* or to receive his prostrations. The blessed *Narayana* will before long send an appropriate Guru for you. Have no worry". So saying, Kanchipurna proceeded towards the temple.

Ramanuja thought within himself: "Taking me to be an unworthy aspirant, he is refusing to bestow his grace upon me. However, I shall purify my soul taking the leavings of his meal. What is caste or sect to him who communes with Sri Varadaraja day and night? A glance of his can transform a *pariah* into one greater than a Brahamana". So thinking, he called on Kanchipurna in the evening and after much importunity persuaded him to agree to have a meal with him the following noon at his house. While accepting the invitation, Kanchipurna said, "Tomorrow I shall sunder the veil of

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Rajas and *Tamas* by taking food from a great devotee like you. Ah me! My great good luck!"

Back home, Ramanuja asked his wife to cook very nice things the next morning for he had invited Mahatma Kanchipurna for dinner. After getting up very early in the morning and finishing her bath, Rakshakambal began cooking. Before the sun was quite up, she had prepared rice and various curries. Ramanuja was very much pleased to see this, and set out towards Kanchipurna's Ashram for fetching him for dinner.

The servant of Varadaraja, on his part, came to know of Ramanuja's intentions and, reaching his home by another way, said addressing Rakshakambal, "Mother, today I have to go to the temple very quickly. Be pleased to serve this son of yours with whatever you have cooked by this time. I can't tarry a moment. Where is your husband?"

"Revered Sir, he has gone to your house to fetch you. He will return right now, please wait a little", said Rakshakambal.

"No Mother, I can't wait a moment," Kanchipurna said.

"I can't neglect the service of the Lord in order to gorge my stomach".

At this Rakshakambal arranged a seat and drinking water without a word, lest the guest should go away unserved, and then, serving item after item, fed the invited guest with great care. After he had finished his meal, Kanchipurna himself threw away the leaf-plate at a great distance, cleared the place with cowdung-water, took some species, and after prostrating himself on the ground before Rakshakambal, took leave. The housewife gave away the remaining portion of the food to a *Shudra*, had the cooking vessels cleaned, and after cleaning the kitchen, started cooking afresh for her husband.

On his return from Kanchipurna's house, Ramanuja came to know everything from his wife and was broken hearted. "Is it a crime to be born in a Brahmin family?" he thought within himself or is it a crime for Kanchipurna to be born in a *Shudra* family?

It was this deep sentiment that drove the saint to get the whole social order completely flooded with the new wave of *Bhakti*. Love for God needs no other introduction or qualification". He was already touched by the ill treatment by the

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orthodox Brahmins and *Pundits* like Yadavaprakash. He could not simply adjust himself to the situation when he found that his own wife was suffering from the same complex.

She could not help it. She was also from a Brahmin's family and although not orthodox even in the ordinary process it was not very easy for an ordinary woman to rise against caste system and offer him the left over food of a *Shudra*. Rakshakambal served the saint's friend and distributed the left over food to the neighbouring poor people and cooked afresh for her husband.

"How can I feed you with the remains of what was served to a Shudra?" She asked Ramanuja.

Ramanuja was a thousand years ahead of his time. He wanted to share *prasad* of the learned devoted soul.

Kanchipurna was very much embarrassed. He was a real devotee of *Nanayana* and was an incarnation of humility. He was an enlighted soul. Ramanuja was a kind man. He would bring along with him poor poople and ask his wife to feed them. Sometimes Rakshakambal would simply refuse to give them any food and say, "there in no food at home". She would go out. Ramanuja would make a thorough search in the kitchen, collect food and distribute it to the destitutes. This added to the fury of the wife who would simply fume in anger.

Immediately after the invitation incident Kanchipurna had left for Tirupati to serve the Holy Shrine of Balaji. But returned within six months when *Sri Varadaraja* directed him to return to Kanchipuram.

This was pre-destined. Ramanuja would always bark upon Kanchipurna to remove his spiritual doubts. All these days he spent restless time. He had many doubts but none to discuss them with. So the return of Kanchipurna was a welcome one. Ramanuja was the happiest and the foremost to meet him. When he told Kanchipurna of the restless condition of his mind, the devoted one asked him not to worry. He immediately referred the matter to his deity Sri Varadaraja.

Now, Ramanuja told him about the restlessness of mind because of the doubts but never gave him the details of his doubts.

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Next day when they met each other Kanchipurna told him : "Look dearest, last night I had a vision. And will you believe what Sri Varadaraja told me when I placed before him your problems?".

With great eagerness and suspense Ramanuja looked at the devoted one.

"I have been directed by the Lord to give you the samans as transmitted by Him. Sri Varadaraja told me : I am the absolute *Brahman*, the cause of *Prakriti* which is the cause of the universe.

"O large minded one, the distinction between *Jeeva* and Iswara is axiomatic. Self surrender at the lotus feet of God is the only cause of liberation of those who strive after final beautitude.

"The liberation of My devotees, even though they fail to remember Me at the last moment of their life is sure to take place.

As soon as My devotees give up their bodies, they attain the Supreme Object.

Take refuge in Mahatma Mahapurna who is endowed with all virtues : Go soon to Ramanuja and tell him what I have told you".

(*Prapannamritam*)

Ramanuja was in ecstasy. He felt like dancing. There were replies to all the six doubts in his mind for the last few days. All the dark clouds were over. The troubled mind got peace. He was sure *Sri Varadaraja* must have conveyed these words through the pure hearted Kanchipurna. Otherwise how could they be the exact replies to his doubts? He forgot about the restrictions by Kanchipurna. He did not listen to his requests, Ramanuja just lay prostrate at the feet of the devoted Shudra; He forgot everything else. Did not like to care for the home or family. Immediately he wanted to leave for Srirangam. He must get initiation from Mahapurna.

Almost a year had passed since Yamunacharya's demise. There was none to replace him in the monastery where both married and unmarried devotees lived together. The wives of the married ones used to live in the city. In the entire Srirangam *Math* there was no learned person who could take the

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responsibility of running it, conducting religious discourses and explaining the suitable purport of the scriptures.

Tiruvaranga, the devoted disciple of the departed Saint was only looking after the organisation. He was more of a pious devotee and wanted to spend all his time in devotion and prayers.

He knew the entire background better even than Ramanuja himself. He told all members about the desire of Yamunacharya who had chosen Ramanuja as his successor and who alone was competent to shoulder the responsibility. The task of bringing Ramanuja and also initiating him was assigned to Mahapurna.

It was a coincidence and a great event. Ramanuja who had left for Srirangam knew nothing about what was happening there. Mahapurna too knew nothing about the proposed plan of Ramanuja who had decided already to leave for Srirangam.

Ramanuja and his wife were both on the bank of a lake at Madurantakam when both Mahapurna and his wife met them suddenly in front of Vishnu temple. Ramanuja was exceedingly happy. For him it was a pleasant surprise. He immediately fell at his feet and asked him the reason of his sudden visit to Kanchipuram. For a moment he was speechless. He did not expect both of them in the tour and of all things, for his initiation. It was his dream to run for Srirangam just at that moment. He was more surprised when the esteemed visitor told him that he had come there to initiate him. He told him it was the last desire of the departed Yamunacharya that he should be initiated by him and he should take charge of the shrine and *Math* at Srirangam.

Ramanuja could not believe his ears. I was going to meet you to get intiation from you, We were just on our way to Srirangam.

Ramanuja implored Mahapurna to give him initiation there itself in front of the *Vishnu temple* at Madurantakam.

Mahapurna desired them to return to Kanchipuram and conduct the sacred ceremony in front of Sri Varadaraja.

Ramanuja did not like to wait for a single minute. His heart and soul was simply dying to get the ever blissful *beejmantram*. He was restless. So he again fell at the feet

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of Mahapurna and said, "Revered Sir, even a minute's delay, I am unable to bear. A man may be asleep, taking food. moving on the road; he may be a young man or a boy,-death brings him under its control under all circumstances".

Ramanuja would simply not leave him. Like a child who weeps for a doll, Ramanuja begged Mahapurna of the sacred blessing with initiation. He had lost the chance once; he did not like to miss it for a second time. He told Mahapurna who knew the whole incident, in fact it was he who came to take Ramanuja to Srirangam at the request of Yamunacharya, how he missed the meeting with that great saint just by few minutes delay. He had left for Srirangam without caring to inform his people. He walked without break for four days and so fast and yet missed Yamunacharya. He had many ideas to exchange with him. He had many doubts, to get clarified by him. He wanted to have regular lessons at his feet and finally in his heart of hearts he had a secret desire to get initiation from him. But destiny wished it otherwise.

Now that Mahapurna was just standing before him he did not like to waste a single moment. Life is so transitory. Anything may happen to either of them. Initiation by Mahapurna was as good as initiation by Yamunacharya. Those who believe in *Guru parampara* accept the next successor as the same. And above all, Kanchipurna's vision was there. Sri Varadaraja desired him to be initiated by Mahapurna only. So all these put together added to the firm conviction of Ramanuja, who was by now fully more than spiritually prepared, that he must be initiated by Mahapurna without any further delay.

According to the most authentic biography of the saint, "Mahapurna was glad beyond measure to hear these words full of the spirit of renunciation. He lighted a sacrificial fire under the spreading branches of the flowering and fragrant *Bakula* tree on the bank of the lake in front of Lord Vishnu, and placed in it two metallic seals, one was inscribed with the sign of the discus and the other with that of the conch. When the two seals got heated Mahapurna uttering the *Vedic Mantras*, pressed on Ramanuja's right and left arms the insignia of the discus and conch respectively. And at last, after meditating upon the feet of Alavandar, he uttered the *Vaish-*

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nava Mantra in his right ear; Thus initiated, Ramanuja worshipped *Mahavishnu* and then started back to Kanchipuram accompanied by his *Guru* and his wife".

Kanchipurna and other contemporary religious heads came to Ramanuja's house to offer their respects to Mahapurna who at the cordial request of Ramanuja also initiated his wife Rakshakambal too. For few days Mahapurna and his wife lived with Ramanuja as directed by the Head of the Srirangam *Math*. This was mainly to teach Ramanuja and prepare him for the heavy responsibility of the Srirangam *Math*.

Ramanuja was hungry for such training. He considered he had already wasted much time first at the college of Yadavaprakash and then delaying to meet Yamunacharya. He should have left for Yamunacharya immediately after he had left Yadavaprakash. He should not have waited for Mahapurna's errand. But who could change the course of destiny?

Rakshakambal was a good intentioned lady. She was quited devoted to her husband but sometimes she showed signs of orthodoxy. Sometimes her demeanour was not befitting the consort of a great philosopher-saint of Ramanuja's status. She was not so broadminded like her husband. Ramanuja did not care for these minor things in life. He tried his best to train her up in his own way. That was also one of the reasons why he insisted on her initiation by the same *Guru*. He insisted on Mahapurna and his wife's stay in the family so that she could get a chance to serve both of them. It is a rare chance to be of any service to the *Guru* and his consort. He looked after both of them with all the care, but his wife was not paying much attention to either. She was very proud of her lineage and would not leave any chance to proclaim that at the top of her voice.

On many earlier occasions Ramanuja calmed down his wife and wanted to bring her to the right track by changing her attitude to life. When one day Ramanuja brought some poor people to feed and she refused to give anything, she avoided the kind work by simply saying there was no food at home. Then, the day Ramanuja invited Kanchipurna she hurriedly got the utensils and the place cleaned by the great saint because he happened to be a *Shudra* and distributed all

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the left-over food to the neighbours denying the husband of his much desired *prasad* of the saint.

Ramanuja was sad beyond limit but in his typical *Vaishanva* way pardoned her.

Ramanuja was exceedingly happy after initiation. This was a much awaited blessing and he was fully utilising the presence of his learned preceptor. Very few saints were so kindly blessed as Ramanuja by the sympathetic learned *Guru* who took all the pains to impart not only spiritual knowledge but also thorough background training by teaching him the most difficult religious books of varied subjects.

Ramanuja was extremely fortunate to have one of the most learned saintly persons like Mahapurna, as his spiritual *Guru*. He knew this and valued that the most. At the house he left half of the accommodation at the disposal of the couple. Every time the *Guru* completed a course of study and started a fresh one he would worship him and offer presents of daily use. He used to offer him terminal fees in kinds and cash and would see meticulously that he was not in any way inconvenienced. Mahapurna was also very happy with Ramanuja's cordial hospitality. He was doubly happy. He thought he was serving his illustrious departed *Guru* by imparting all the necessary training that was expected of one who would be taking charge of the Srirangam *Math*. The wife was happy too. Where would she find a more devoted disciple and host than Ramanuja?

But this was not to continue for long. It was perhaps all pre-destined. Otherwise why should a lady from such a high family misbehave with the *Guru Patni*, the wife of the *Guru*?

The whole episode changed the course of life of Ramanuja. Ramanuja had never been so happy as he was immediately after initiation. It is recorded in his biography, "After his initiation, all the mental troubles of Ramanuja disappeared. Sanctified by the five purificatory rites of *Yajna*, *Ankana*, *Urdhvapundra*, *Mantra* and *Dasyanama* he began to consider himself blessed. He had attained peace of mind by the grace of Mahapurna, his supreme benefactor. No wonder, he looked upon his *Guru* as *Narayana* himself. He would never take his meal without first taking the *Prasad* of the Guru. After getting up from bed, he prostrated himself before him".

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The incident that took place suddenly centring round Rakshakambal's misdemeanour was beyond anybody's belief. It happened like this.

Ramanuja had gone out shopping. He had just finished one course of study. He wanted to offer sixteen items known as *Shodashopachara* on the occasion of starting a fresh course.

Rakshakambal had gone to fetch water from the well. It seems the *Guru-patni's* pitcher touched her pitcher and she made an unnecessary hue and cry. She thought the water in the pitcher became impure because it touched that of the wife of the *Guru*. This was too much. The guests felt terribly upset and finally left Ramanuja's house before the saint returned from shopping. On his return Ramanuja heard everything. He simply did not know what to tell her. This was the limit. The ignorant woman had crossed all her limits. He had no face to show his *Guru*.

He took a decision then and there. He must join the order of renunciation. He must embrace *Sannyas*. He did not like to make a scene. Being a learned man he kept quiet, arranged to send his wife to her parent's house with the plea of a marriage ceremony. He left home and reached the holy shrine of Varadaraja and surrendered himself before the deity. He said, "O *Narayana*, grant this servant of yours refuge at your lotus feet".

His *sannyas* has been described so vividly by Swami Ramakrishnananda in the following words:

> "Reaching the temple, he prostrated himself before Sri Varadaraja and submitted, 'My Lord, today I have become yours in every way. Do please accept me'. So saying, he procured some ochre cloth and a staff touched by the feet of Varadaraja and went to the banks of the old lake in front of the temple. After oblutions, he ignited the sacrificial fire and therein made oblations of the desire for wealth and wife. At that time, Kanchipurna as commanded by Varadaraja addressed him as *Yatiraja* (king among ascetics). He then accepted the triple staff (*tridanda*) of the *sannyasi* as a symbol of keeping the body, mind and speech under control. *Yatiraja*, dressed in shining robes, now appeared as effulgent as the newly risen sun".

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Ramanuja embraced celibacy to save himself from the materialistic earthly desire. So by sending his wife by forging a fake letter he must have not done full justice to his wife. He simply called a poor Brahmin, got many presents purchased himself as if they were all sent by his father-in-law and in the forged letter mentioned that his wife's sister was going to be married soon. Both Rakshakambal and Ramanuja should join them. He said he would join her later.

When Rakshakambal left him she did it very joyfully. She touched his feet with full respect and with all courtesy begged him to join her. She could not imagine for a moment that the whole thing was a mere trick.

Was it befitting? Such a great saint like Ramanuja? His own people ask these questions. Except taking the whole matter in a lighter vein, there is no explanation to the whole episode.

For the learned Ramanuja the Epic *Mahabharata* gave him support. The great Epic says:

Apadarthang dhanang rakshat
Daran rakshedh anairapi
Atmanang satatang rakshet
Daroirapi dhanoirapi

Wealth should be preserved by warding off calamity; the wife should be protected even by losing that wealth; the self should be always preserved even by losing the wealth and the wife.

Most of the learned scholars supported the saint's action. They were of the view that this was, perhaps the only way left to the saint. The wife's tears might have changed his mind.

Some of the wives of great saints who were even spiritually inclined, did not like to part away with their husbands. Rakshakambal was hardly helpful to the saint in any manner. She had only pained him. It is observed that "Rakshakambal was not quite so devoted a wife. Thrice she failed to carry out the behest of her husband. Ramanuja could not have divulged his inner feelings to her. A proud, self-seeking woman wished that her husband should always remain engaged in her service rather than in the service of God. Ramanuja tried hard to sow

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the seeds of devotion to God in the heart of Rakshakambal; but seeing that the soil was barren, he waited for the time when he could help himself and her by parting from her. He knew tears alone could wash away the sands of selfishness from her heart and hence his renunciation of hearth and home. As a result of this, on the one hand his mind, so eager to serve God, could remain blissfully absorbed in His meditation day in and day out; on the other, the tears of repentance would moisten and fertilize Rakshakambal's heart. So Ramanuja did nothing wrong in taking *Sannyas* in the manner he did".

Both were equally handsome and young. Both were from very high lineage. Perhaps both were equally talented although not much is known about the intellectual brilliance of the saint's wife. One thing is clear. She must have been spiritual, advanced mentally if not outwardly. Otherwise, first she could not have been the consort of a saint of such a high order. Secondly, she must have attained high spiritual state of mind otherwise a great saint like Mahapurna would not have initiated her.

Thirdly, perhaps this was necessary for her to be obstinate, otherwise Ramanuja would have never joined the ascetic order. Finally what is pre-destined must happen. None can stop it.

Who was the *Guru* of this great saint who initiated him to *Sannyas* or renunciation? Mahapurna was his spiritual *Guru* who gave him the *mahamantra* in the *Vaishnava* order. He was not present when Ramanuja turned an ascetic. Ramanuja made *Sri Varadaraja* his *Guru* this time. He already got the *mantra*. Fresh *mantra* was not necessary. He had seen Kanchipurna talking to *Sri Varadaraja*. In fact, in his own case also, many directions and clarifications came from the deity.

Ramanuja who had been serving both *Sri Varadaraja* and His constant servant Kanchipurna could think of no better *Guru*.

Ramanuja did not follow the *Advaita* School of Sankara, or his first Guru and teacher Yadavaprakash. As the details are recorded, "He did not accept as his *Guru* any *Sannyasin* of the order of Sri Sankara. The Eternal Lord Varadaraja Himself became his *Guru*; single minded and spontaneous devotion to the Lord was the reason for his taking *Sannyas*. Immersed in single minded meditation on God, it became difficult for him

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to pay any heed to household affairs. Hence, he may be called a *Sannyasin* of the path of devotion".

He was the forerunner of this new path.

As it happened, in the lives of all great men, Ramanuja became the centre of criticism and simultaneously of appreciation from people around him. Some described him as mad. Some thought he was nothing less than a God. Persons in large numbers started coming just to see him. Very soon the shrine of Varadaraja became the centre of attraction for hundreds of truth-seekers.

People were eager to accept Ramanuja's discipleship. Dasarathi, a close relation and a well versed erudite scholar was among his first batch of disciples. He was very much devoted to the three V's—*Vedas*, *Vedanta* and *Vishnu*.

Kuresa was perhaps the second disciple. He had a photographic memory. Both Dasarathi and Kuresa started arranging discourses by their Guru Ramanuja for the benefit of the people.

One by one, more known and unknown persons started visiting Ramanuja. His earlier Guru Yadavaprakash's mother came one day and was simply marvelled at Ramanuja's beaming face and brilliance of exposition of message of God. He was immediately recognised by the pious lady as a new saviour of mankind. She did not waste any time in directing her son to meet the young brilliant *Sannyasin*. The mother was worried for her son who was spending restless time. He lost all peace of mind. He felt sad at his own ill treatment of Ramanuja. Nobody even knew better than Yadavaprakash the brilliance and possibility of the saint in the making. In fact that discovery was the reason for his jealousy for his otherwise favourite student. The mother knew the whole story. Now she saw Ramanuja installed as the head of Sri Varadaraja *Math*. He had taken to *sannyas* too. So there was no harm in bringing the son and making him fall at the feet of the young saint.

At the illustrious biographer tells us, "Returning home, she expressed her feelings and importuned her son to act accordingly. Yadava, of course, would not dream of becoming the disciple of his own disciple. But he found no peace in his wrong decision. While absent-mindedly loitering about, he suddenly came across Kanchipurna and asked him, "Sir, my

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mind is restless. Please tell me how this could be remedied. You are the mouthpiece of Varadaraja and so all-knowing".

"Go home today", replied Kanchipurna, "I shall tell you something tomorrow after knowing the truth from the Lord".

Yadavaprakash spent another sleepless night. This time with greater curiosity and agony. He did not know what to do. On one side, the mother was convinced. The mother was insisting that the only panacea for him was acceptance of discipleship of Ramanuja. That was not a simple matter, particularly for a person like Yadavaprakash with such a strong ego and deep conviction in the philosophy of *Advaita*. He could not reconcile himself with the situation. At the same time, he, as a learned person, could appreciate in his heart of hearts the greatness of Ramanuja also. When in fact he heard his mother's suggestion of meeting Ramanuja he thought it was perhaps a divine message through the lips of his mother. Because in his heart of hearts he was also thinking very much in that line.

Now he was waiting for the instructions of Kanchipurna. By now people in the whole neighbourhood knew about the godman's conversation with the shrine. They all knew that Sri Varadaraja had direct communication with this simple honest dedicated soul. He knew how he helped Ramanuja in finding the right path and how he got clarification of his six doubts.

These things always spread like wild fire. They were no longer any secret. The theoretical knowledge of *Advaita* could not give him mental peace. He was sad also for the heinous plot he hatched to get Ramanuja killed. Varadaraja was surprised at his miraculous escape from the Vindhya forest, his meeting with the divine consort who came to his rescue, his healing of the princess of Kanchipuram, his initiation by Mahapurna and before that the three vows before Yamunacharya before his death were household events discussed regularly and of all persons his former *Guru* certainly could not keep his ears or eyes closed to the whole thing. Now he was in a dilemma.

Next day with great suspense Yadavaprakash approached

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Kanchipurna who was waiting for him to convey the divine message of Sri Varadaraja.

Kanchipurna told Yadava that his mind would get peace only if he got initiated by Ramanuja. He described the different great qualities of Ramanuja. He suggested an immediate meeting between the two.

Ramanuja was head of the *math* of Varadaraja. With much hesitation Yadava advanced towards Ramanuja. He had no occasion to see the illustrious disciple after he turned him out of his house because of his arguments against *Advaita* philosophy, which was rather more out of jealousy.

Ramanuja, like a typical *Vaishnava* saint received his former *Guru* with all the warmth and respect. Yadavaprakash did not expect it. He was overwhelmed with his demeanour. Then they entered into disussion. Showing the two insignia of lotus and discus, Yadava asked Ramanuja, "Does it not indicate that you think that only through the worship of the *Saguna Brahman* one may get peace of mind? Can you justify by showing the approval of any scriptures?". The first disciple and a vastly learned scholar Kuranath was sitting next to Ramanuja. The saint said, "Kuranath, you have read so many scriptures, kindly tell him the sources".

Yadava also asked him to oblige him. Kuranath, popularly known as Kuresa, then told him, "we can establish this on the basis of *Sruti*." He quoted from *Rig-Baghkala-Sakha* and said, "The best among men wear the pure insignia of *Vishnu's* lotus and discuss on his arms to cross the ocean of *Samsara*. Some wear those ancient insignia on the body."

Then Kuresa quoted from *Sama Veda* and said, "Fire is pure; He is as beautiful as the thousand petalled lotus. The lotus is like a circular instrument. He whose body has been burnt by the application of the said instrument heated red in fire has attained the state of the ultimate absorption of soul in the divine essence and hence the right to live in *Brahmaloka*."

Then the scholar disciple quoted from *Atharva Veda* and said, "Like those who go to the abode of *Vishnu*, being marked by the insignia of discus, we too shall be impressed by the emblem of *Vishnu* and gain affluence here and hereafter".

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Then Kuresa quoted from *Atharva Veda* again and said, "He is all-wise and omniscient. So he is *Saguna*. He is endowed with various highest powers. Knowledge, strength and action are his natural attributes." Then he started quoting extensively from *Chhandagyopanishad*, *Taittiriya Narayanopanishad*, *Mahopanishad*, *Hari-bhakti Suddhodaya* and strongly confirmed that *Vishnu* was *Saguna*, God was omniscient. He hurled these quotations effortlessly :

> He is devoid of any trace of sin; decrepitude, death, bereavement, hunger and thirst are not there in Him. Whatever He desires and determines never come to be false.
>
> (Chandogya Upanishad)

Kuresa said, according to *Narayanopanishad*

Narayanang Param Brahman
Tottvang Narayanah Parah

Nrayana is the Supreme *Brahman*. He is the ultimate Reality.

He said, according to *Narayana-atharva-Sira Upanishad*, *Narayanang ebedang saibang*.

All these are nothing but *Narayana* Himself. According to the same *uphaishad* He alone is free from blemish, is sinless, without change, without name, pure and revealer of everything. According to *Mahopanishad Narayana* alone was. Then none of Brahma, Siva, Earth, Sky, Stars, Water, Fire, Death or Sun was there.

With great emotion Kuresa then said with tears rolling down his cheeks

Hari parayanang parang Hari parayanang param
Punah punarbadamyahang Hari parayanang param

Hari or *Vishnu* is the Supreme Refuge. *Hari* alone is the supreme refuge. I say repeatedly *Hari* is the supreme refuge.

The learned devotee of Ramanuja kept everybody spell bound. Ramanuja himself was appreciating the spantaneous flow of the scriptures from the lips of Kuresa. The old former *Guru* of Ramanuja who was so proud of his abstract dry learning was simply dumb struck. He was known to be the most

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learned *pundit* of Kanchipuram and the neighbourhood. He was proud. He was insolent. He was mad after name and fame to the extent that he did not hesitate to hatch a plan to get his favourite disciple killed. They were all because of his limited bookish learning which was never the realised knowledge. He had never seen a really enlightened learned person. He could not think a person could be ever so learned. He could not dream that a person could have such photographic memory. There must be a divine touch. He was already repenting his ill deeds. Atonement always heals mental anxiety. He was gradually coming to proper senses. He was becoming more and more docile. That volatile Yadavaprakash was no longer there. Insted it was a quieter person with a big question mark on his face. What next?

Now there was no doubt for him about God's omniscience. He was convinced that *Iswara* was *Saguna*. He suddenly did an unbelievable thing. He fell prostrate at the feet of Ramanuja and with tears asked for his pardon. "Give me shelter at your feet. I am at your mercy."

Ramanuja was always an humble and modest person. He always extended the highest respect to his *Guru*. Although he knew about his plots, he never divulged it to anybody. Now he felt embarrassed. He lifted him affectionately, embraced him and consoled him gently.

Yadavaprakash's initiation was a very interesting incident both in the life of Ramanuja and Yadava. As the biographer gives the details of the historic incident it changed the course of life of Yadava altogether.

"After getting his mother's permission that very day, Yadavaprakasa took *sannyas* from his former disciple and considered himself blessed. Being purified by the five purificatory rites such as the wearing of the *Urdhvapundra*, *Ankana* and *Dasyanama*, he put on the ochre garment. And on being given the name *'Govinda Jeer'* by his *Guru*, he experienced supreme bliss. His old aversion to the path of devotion was utterly gone. All his pride of erudition disappeared also. He became a different man altogehter. His once dry eyes were now flooded day and night with tears of repentance. Instead of pride, humillty now filled his heart. He became a really devoted *Vaishnava*. Seeing this superhuman power of Rama-

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nuja, even those those who had spoken ill of him now acknowledged him as an incarnation of God. The aroma of his fame spread far and wide. Noticing the change in his former *Guru*, Ramanuja told him one day, "O large-hearted one, your mind has become free of dross. To wash out the sins of the past, you may write a book on the *Vaishnava* religion, delineating the duties of a real *Viashnava*. Then you shall attain perfect peace".

Ramanuja had not only friends, he had many enemies-particularly those who did not agree with him in his spiritual interpretations. It was not an ordinary thing to stand against the mainstream of the already established thoughts particularly preached and practised by saints like *Bhagawan* Sankara-Sankara's *Advaita* was not accepted by the followers of Ramanuja school. When the lay people, and even the mendicants devoted to God, found that great learned old people like Yadavaprakash left their own school and joined Ramanuja, they were convinced about the intellectual and spiritual depth of the saint.

This was equally well-known that Ramanuja, an incarnation of humility, never challenged his former *Guru*. He did not invite him either to accept his ideology. It was completely voluntary on the part of Yadava. In fact he had just begged of his former disciple to initiate him and accept him under his umbrella.

No doubt, Yadava was a learned person. At the instance and instruction of Ramanuja he wrote a book *Yatidharma samuccaya*. He, with his maturity of experience, deep learning and the newly achieved devotion, made a beautiful treatise which is considered as a masterpiece in the Ramanuja school.

So, even those who were in the opposite camps started joining him. He practically had none to oppose him intellectually. He became an uncrowned prince of spiritual world of the whole neighbourhood.

For a long time Ramanuja did not hear from his *Guru* Mahapurna or about the monastery at Srirangam. Many a times the head of the monastery the late learned Yamunacharya, told his disciples about the greatness of the young saint.

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When the *Guru* Manapurna returned with his wife to Srirangam leaving Ramanuja behind, the head of the Srirangam monastery was equally disappointed. Yamunacharya had told them that Ramanuja was an *Avatara*. He clearly directed that after his death Ramanuja should be made head of the monastery. None questioned it either. There was no jealousy or bickering on this ground. But Mahapurna had left the place in sheer anger and could not meet his disciple in a hurry. He somehow felt that if Ramanuja returned from shopping he would have never allowed him to leave him.

When he heard that Ramanuja had become an ascetic his joy knew no bounds. He knew fully well that all his plans would click one by one and sooner or later they would be able to get Ramanuja as head of their monastery. They were in ecstasy when they came to know of Yadavaprakash's discipleship. None liked Yadava in the Srirangam monastery. Yamunacharya met him at Kanchipuram as a matter of courtesy and was happy to have gone there because he discovered there Ramanuja, but unfortunately he could not talk to him. From his face, his demeanour, his eyes and expressions, Yamunacharya could anticipate about the future greatness of the young scholar. After all, for nearly ten decades Yamunachara had been in this line training so many intellectuals and himself practising spiritual pursuits.

Mahapurna was lamenting for his separation with his disciple. He was sad also because he could not fulfil the last desire of Yamunacharya. He failed to bring Ramanuja to Srirangam and give him the entire charge of the holy shrine of Ranganatha. He was quite sure of the achievement of his disciple and did not like to waste any further time. He commissioned Vararanga, a senior disciple of Yamunachary to go to Kanchipurna and bring the saint.

It was not an easy task. Why shonld the devotees at Kanchipuram leave him so easily ? Why should they allow Ramanuja to take charge of another monastery when he was already looking after one ? Why should *Sri Varadaraja* allow his devotee to leave him and rush to another monastery ? All these were very subtle sensitive questions. So, Mahapurna sent Vararanga who was not only a great scholar and organiser, but he was a deeply spiritual person with highest self

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sacrifice and dedication. He used to believe in prayers more than anything else.

Vararanga came to Kanchipurna without giving any notice to the saint or his followers. He just went to the temple of *Sri Varadaraja* and sat for prayers. He had only one boon to ask for. He wanted to take with him Ramanuja to Srirangam without any opposition from any devotees or resistance from the saint himself. He knew one thing. Once Ramanuja disagreed to his proposal in one pretext or another, no power on earth could change his mind. He was so much devoted to *Sri Varada raja*, he was so close to Kanchipurna, it was not so easy for him either to leave for Srirangam all of a sudden.

What was happening at Srirangam ?

There, Mahapurna was offering constant prayer to Lord *Vishnu*. He was repeatedly uttering the same prayer, "O Protector of the helpless, Perfect One, Supreme Brahman you bring about the perfection of all. Deign to bring Ramanuja to your feet and fulfil our great want".

Sri Varadaraja listened to the prayers of both. Without any word of protest from anybody or himself, Ramanuja left for Srirangam immediately as if he was just waiting for this errand.

When Vararanga reached Srirangam along with Ramanuja triumphantly, the devotees there felt like celebrating a great festival or a war victory. There was a stir in the whole *Vaishnava* community. Their joy knew no bounds. Now that Ramanuja had taken charge of the Srirangam monastery they were sure that the message of the Master, that great one of love and better understanding between man and God, would spread like wild fire. The followers of *Saguna Brahman* as against Sankaracharya's *Nirgun Brahman* were delighted everywhere. Many neutral followers and those who had their doubts and were on the margin, now unhesitatingly joined the order of the *Vaishnava* school and were convincely worshipping *Mahavishnu*, the omniscient almighty God.

Although Mahapurna was continuing his training, the highest seat was assigned to Ramanuja in the monastery. Only he was eligible to initiate new devotees. Ramanuja initiated even the son of Mahapurna at the request of the latter. Mahapurna thought he might be more learned academi-

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cally and that might be due to experience, but spiritually he ranked Ramanuja higher. After the sittings with Mahapurna was over, the saint was directed to meet Goshthipurna, the most learned contemporary *Vaishnava* saint.

Goshthipurna must have heard about Ramanuja. He must have been knowing about his spiritual attainment. And yet he declined to meet him.

Acharya Ramanuja did not know what to do. He was quite satisfied with the initiation and training of his illustrious *Guru* Mahapurna, but it was he who was insisting on his getting in touch with Goshthipurna. But Goshthipurna would simply not meet him. There must have been some loop-hole somewhere. Ramanuja did not know where. Even Mahapurna was surprised.

Meanwhile, Govinda did not return from Kalahasti near Varanasi. He was devoted to the *Banalinga* whom he worshipped daily after a holy bath. Ramanuja had great affection for him not only because he was his first cousin or classmate or colleague, he was most grateful to him for saving his life from the murderous plot of Yadavaprakash. He was an ardent worshipper of *Shiva*. Ramanuja somehow had a great yearning to give him a taste of the nectar he had received from the blessings of *Mahavishnu*. He wanted to send an errand to him at Kalahasti. He sent a word to the *Vaishnava* scholar Sailapurna who was living at Sri Saila near Kalahasti. Govinda used to be in touch with Sailapurna. Sailapurna attracted the attention of Govinda gradually to the worship of *Vishnu*. Govinda was not an orthodox devotee. To him there was hardly any difference between *Hari* and *Hara* and finally devoted his whole attention to the worship of *Vishnu*. The old learned *Vaishnava* scholar Sailapurna initiated him. Govinda soon joined Ramanuja. "Boundless was his joy to have Govinda by his side. Before long he plunged his friend into the nectar ocean of bliss. The divine beauty of *Sriman Narayana*, the concentrated form of all that is beautiful in the entire universe, very soon dawned in Govinda's heart, purified through love and devotion. The Srirangam *Math* became, as it were the gate of heaven where were sprinkled the waters of peace on countless afflicted souls".

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But Ramanuja was not happy in his heart of hearts. What could be the reason of the refusal of the learned Goshthipurna to have even a meeting with him. So far Ramanuja tried to contact him eighteen times. He visited the scholar eighteen times an and on every occasion he had to return disappointed. The details of this epoch-making event is given by Swami Ramakrishnananda as follows :

Ramanuja was very sad. He wanted to know the reason of the wrath of Maha Goshthipurna. He had not misbehaved with him or did not remember to have criticised him either. Yamunacharya had three eminent disciples. And Goshthipurna was the most learned among them. It was difficult for Ramanuja to achieve perfection without having a regular lesson from this learned preceptor. But how to meet him ? He was stern and was rigid in his conviction. It became almost impossible for him to gate-crash him. Eighteen times he tried and on all occasions, Goshthipurna just banged the door on his face. Ramanuja was in great agony. He was spending sleepless nights. Inspite of his great spiritual achievement intellectual attainment, he could not get peace of mind because of this unseemingly behaviour of a learned person to wards him. He had no enemies because he did not have any hatred against anybody. He was himself a symbol of humility and a great seeker of Truth. What could be the reason ?

A close disciple of Goshtipurna who saw his great mental pain approached the old veteran one, and asked him the reason. He pleaded for an immediate meeting between these two great learned men. He convinced Goshthipurna that Ramanuja would simply die if he could not meet Goshthipurna. Goshthipurna told him the reason of his anger. He said, "Look dear, initiation or teaching spiritual things cannot be done in public. Every time this man comes to meet me, he brings with him a couple of his disciples. How can I give him real knowledge in the presence of so many ? Why does he bring them ?"

So this good man carried the errand of the saint and requested Ramanuja to meet Goshthipurna immediately but all alone. He must not take with him any person because Goshthipurna did not like other persons when he initiated anybody.

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Ramanuja was very happy. He immediately rushed to Goshthipurna's house. This time he was very expectant of getting the real spiritual guidance from the old saint. He was the most learned among the existing *Vaishnava* philosophers. And Ramanuja was extremely eager to have his lessons from him. He could not wait for a single minute. But what was this ? The old man was in fury. Again he was very angry. The old friend and a fellow disciple who arranged this meeting directed Ramanuja clearly that he should not carry with him any person excepting his *Kamandal* and stick. This time Ramanuja had with him two of his disciples only. They were Dasarathi and Sribatsanka. When Goshthipurna lost his temper Ramanuja was behaving very quietly. Very calmly he told Goshthipurna, "Sir, why are you unnecssarily getting annoyed with me; I have not done any thing wrong" Goshthipurna said, "Did I not inform you that you should never bring with you any person ? Why have you brought these two fellows ?" Ramanuja replied, "But Sir, you asked me to bring with me one *Kamandal* and a stick. Did you not ?" He said, "Yes, but they are two persons".

Ramanuja explained that these two disciples were to him like a *Kamandal* and *Danda* (stick) without whom he could not move out. This explanation gave immense joy to Goshthipurna who found the saint's immense love for his disciples. To him his disciple were part and parcel of his self. Goshthipurna was very happy; he started giving him regular lessons.

He knew, here was the symbol of compassion, love and an ideal representative of God who could spread the highest thoughts of *Vaishnavism*. He could at once feel the great potentialities of Ramanuja as a world preacher. He forgot all his past rudeness shown to the eager saint. He could realise how he misunderstood the saint out of his own ignorance about his demeanour. What he mistook for Ramanujacharya's ego was in fact his immense and endless love for his own men. He made them so much involved in the new task of spreading *Vaishnavism* that he could not identify them as separate entities.

This was the unique aspect in Ramanuja which distinguished him from other *Acharyas*. So Goshtipurna's personal

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affection and respect for Ramanuja immediately doubled spontaneously.

Goshthipurna was very happy at his attitude towards his disciples whom he loved as his own children or perhaps more than that. Love for human beings is a very important aspect of *Vaishnava* Philosophy. When Ramanuja was affectionately touching his two disciples, Goshtipurna noticed that he was doing so with great sympathy and compassion for his two favourite disciples.

When a devotee is blessed by a really powerful spiritual guide, a new wave flows into his whole body like electric current and he feels the blessings. All concentrated spiritual force in different manners. Goshthipurna transmitted a strong spiritual current through a *Mantra* into the ear of Acharya Ramanuja. It was so powerful that immediately Ramanujacharya had a blissful vision of the Almighty God *Vishnu*. Ramanuja was in this blissful state of mind for quite sometime. He never had these great experiences before, although he had many other spiritual experiences earlier.

Goshtipurna was happy beyond limit. He could anticipate the receiving power of his new disciple. In fact he was looking for a soul which could hold such great spiritual power. He was old and he wanted an *Adhar* or soul which could withstand the spiritual force which was as powerful as Goshthipurna himself. Both perhaps were equally eagerly waiting for the incident and now that this whole initiation ceremony was over, Ramanuja wanted to leave the new *Guru*.

He did something unique. He collected a number of persons from around and started reciting the same *Mantra* very loudly. When the whole crowd started reciting the same *Mantra* in a chorus, Goshthipurna heard it and he was very much annoyed. He called Ramanuja and in a very angry tone rebuked him:

"Did I give you this pure *Mantra* to be misused like this? Is it proper on your part to shout at the top of your voice in the public place in the midst of so many persons together? Is it the way you should misuse my spiritual power given to you?".

Ramanuja never lost his temper; coolly and calmly he told his *Guru* that the pure *Mantra* in the name of *Vishnu* had given

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him immense joy which he never experienced before. He wanted to share his joy with all those who were around him. So he did not consider it a wrong action on his part. He explained to his *Guru* that after all these people also need divine blessings to lead a spiritual life. If he did not utter this *Mantra* along with them they would be denied of a very great opportunity of divine blessings. Goshthipurna was convinced. He had to agree with Ramanuja. The young saint now started his new campaign with new vigour to spread this message of *Maha Vishnu*. Goshthipurna was now a different person. He thought he had transmitted all his spiritual power to Acharya Ramanuja. Now he wanted to put even his own son Saumyanarayana under the spiritual guidance of the young saint in whom he had full trust. Goshthipurna was having so such confidence in Ramanuja that he declared in public in the presence of all intellectuals and devotees that henceforth the entire system of offering prayers by the *Vaishnavas* would be known as *Ramanuja Siddhanta*. Even today, in the cultural history of India, this is being followed as desired by the veteran saint.

His maternal uncle who had named him as Ramanuja had perhaps a vision that this young man was an incarnation of the younger brother of Ramchandra of the Epic fame, Lakshmana. Literally *Ramanuja* means younger brother of Rama. With all his new and old disciples Ramanuja now returned to Srirangam.

Ramanuja now took up the task of training all his disciples in a scientific manner. Kuresa, Dasarathi, Saumyanarayana, Sribatsanka were his direct disciples. Govinda, his first cousin, was disciple of Ramanuja's friend Sailapurna but was more attached to him. He not only gave all these disciples spiritual training but taught them the details of the minutest demeanour as expected of a devoted *Vaishnava*. On their part, his disciples never considered their *Guru* anything less than an incarnation of *Vishnu*. Ramanuja tested his disciples sometimes quite rigorously. People thought he was expecting too much out of them. After all, they too had qualified for discipleship of the saint. By no means were they of ordinary cadre. They passed in all the tests.

Once suddenly Ramanuja asked one of his most learned disciples, Dasarathi, to accompany Attula, daughter of the

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saint's Guru Mahapurna. It was quite an embarrassing situation for all. But none could challenge the saint. He had to be honoured.

The story is interesting. It seems Mahapurna got his daughter married to an interior village. There was a scarcity of water which had to be fetched from a far away well. The poor girl had to cook and perform all domestic works herself. She found it quite difficult to manage. She explained her position to her in-laws. They just insulted her and asked her to get the matter sorted out by her parents. When she narrated her difficulties to her father Mahapurna, the saintly person directed her to his disciple Ramanuja, Attula was like a sister to all the disciples of Mahapurna. Ramanuja did not know how to settle the issue. He thought for a few minutes then thought of a plan. He asked his illustrious disciple Dasarathi to accompany Attula to her in-laws' place in the disguise of a cook. The learned disciple at once agreed and accompanied the girl. The problem of the cook was solved. Attula, the poor girl had some relief. But at what cost?

Dasarathi continued as a cook for quite some time. She was the daughter of an illustrious scholar. So it is quite obvious that she was not married to an ordinary family. They also were well conversed with *Sastras* and the house attracted quite a number of scholars who would often come for debates on religious subjects. This was a common feature in earlier days. All their time used to be spent in *tarka* (debate) or *vichar* (decision) on God or associated subjects.

Everyday the cook would listen to the religious debates by the visitors. Six months had already passed like this. One day it so happened that both sides were interpreting a subject absolutely in a wrong way. The learned scholar kept silent all these days. It was a great intellectual torture for him. But he thought there must be some reason behind his *Guru's* decision. So he never spoke a word and pretended to be just an unlettered fellow. That day he could not control himself any more. He pointed out the mistakes of both the sides in his typically learned way. The entire house got the surprise of their life. "Who is the servant?" Soon they discovered it was Dasarathi, the most learned disciple of Ramanuja. The saint had put him there to kill his ego. His vanity as a great scholar

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had gone. This was done intentionally by Ramanuja. It had a background. After his return from Goshthipurna along with his son to Srirangam the devoted disciple Kuresa wanted the saint to explain the deeper significance of the philosophy of the *Geeta*. He wanted to know the way to complete surrender. The divine assurance is there. "Whoever completely surrenders himself to me, I take his full charge". But how to cultivate that spirit? Ramanuja had explained that to the most learned one. Kuresa was not only the most learned, he was also the most devoted one. That was why he had a very sharp memory and cleanest heart. Whereas Dasarathi's was slightly different case. He was a learned scholar, devoted to the *Guru*, but Ramanuja felt the vanity in him did not die out. He was conscious of his deep learning unlike Kuresa.

Vanity is a big deterrant to enlightenment and self-realisation. One must completely identify oneself with the will of God. One must feel that whatever is being done is His will. Nothing can take place without His desire. One's knowledge is His knowledge; one's ignorance is due to his negligence of divine duties. So, when one day when Dasarathi wanted to know, like his colleague Kuresa the significance of *Geeta*, the saint asked him to spend some time in meditation, right thinking and simple living.

This was a great opportunity for Dasarathi to lead a simple life. He was now qualified to learn the significance of *Geeta*. As promised, Ramanuja gave that knowledge. Ramanuja did not believe only in training his followers. He himself never stopped learning. Upto the last he wanted to get as much of learning and spiritual guidance from the senior contemporary *Vaishnava* Masters. Yamunacharya had left a rich treasure of enlightened knowledge. He learnt all his works by heart. Then he followed the five ardent followers of the departed saint one by one. These five veterans were Kanchipurna, Mahapurna, Goshthipurna, Maladhara and Vararanga. They were not only greatly learned. They were spiritually enlightened souls. Ramanuja had his detailed training under all the five. The first three treated Ramanuja more intimately that even a son. The other two treated him as a friend or equal. He treated all the five as his *Gurus*. This was because of his highest regard for Yamunacharya whose personal contact he missed due to

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his sudden demise. Yamunacharya built up the five disciples specialists in five branches of knowledge. Now Ramanuja alone could represent Yamunacharya's deep spiritual learning. "The abundance of superhuman powers manifested in Yatiraja is proof of that. He had the special power of seeing God face to face and talking to Him. What is more, he could draw afflicted souls—souls burnt in the flames of wordly miseries—to the feet of God and remove all their miseries. This is why he used to be called *Ubhayavibhutipati*".

Just before the demise of the saint Yamunacharya, Ramanuja promised him three things. In fact the saint had already died but showed keen desire of getting the three tasks completed by signs of fingers. Parasara, the great scholar saint, author of *Vishnu Purana* was being neglected. His memory was to be perpetuated. The second was "immortalisation of the glory of *Nammalvar*. The third and most important was "the interpretation of *Vyasa's Brahma-Sutra* according to *Vishistadvaita* system.

By now Ramanuja had been more or less free. He had left the earthly attachments and joined the monastic order. He had taken charge of the Srirangam Temple as its Head or *Acharya*. He devoted himself heart and soul in the study of the philosophy of Yamunacharya. There were senior disciples of the saint who were taught by the saint himself. Now they took the charge of transmitting the same to the young merdicant for further propagation.

That was not enough. Ramanuja went to Kashmir to "copy" the *Vritti* or commentary of *Bodhayara* which was an authentic interpretation of *Brahma-Sutra* in the *Vishistadvaita* system.

The preparation took quite some years and the saint took up the matter enthusiastically. Not only intellectually but spiritually too he thoroughly prepared himself for the great task. Because of this zealous practice and training "Ramanuja gave to the world in succession, the several works which have made him the first amongst the *Sri Vaishnava* philosophers". These works included *Vedanta Sangraa*, "an elaborate essay on the teachings of the principal *Upanishads* in which he attacks the *Advaitic* meaning of *Tattvamasi* as well as the doctrine of *Maya* laid down by Sankara and the *Bhedabheva* doctrines of

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the Yadava and Bhaskara schools". Then he traced the origin of *Vishistadvaita* quoting extensively from the *Vedic* scriptures —interconnecting them and analysing them in a fresher manner. He was convinced of one thing and unreservedly propounded the theory that "the supreme Deity is to be called *Narayana* and not by any other name known to the *Upanishads*". After *Vedanta-sangraha*, Ramanuja wrote *Vedanta-sara*, the substance of *Vedanta*. It has been described as "a lucid and short commentary on the *Brahma-Sutra*". Then Ramanuja wrote *Vedantadipa*, the lamp of *Vedanta*. This was by and large a treatise "which explains the main lessons taught in the *Brahma-Sutra* in a fuller and more discursive form than in the previous treatise". *Gudyatraya* was another masterly work during this period. In this lucid literary as well as spiritual treatise the saint explains the significance of complete surrender to God as the simplest and easiest way of God realisation. It is described as "a devotional prose lyric embodying the principle or surrender". Another outstanding contribution of the saint scholar was the commentary on the *Geeta*. This "has been in its turn expanded by *Vedanta Desika* in his *Tatyarpachandrika*". The masterpiece of this great mind was *Sribhasya* on the *Vedanta-Sutra*.

Ramanujacharya completed the important treatise *Sribhasya*. By then he had a large number of disciples among whom there were nearly a hundred learned scholars. He had a few thousand disciples. They all suggested that the saint should go like Sankaracharya on a mission of spiritual conquest which is popularly known as *Digvijaya*. He went to Cholas and reached Kanchipuram, his old place, from where he went to Kombakonam. There a number of scholars had discussions and debates on religious matters. They mainly restricted their debate on the scriptures but could not stand the strong arguments of the saint. He was so strong in his reasonings and convictions that they all had to accept them ultimately. They all became his followers.

From Kombakonam the saint left for Madura which was the capital of *Pandya* Kingdom. It was a place of great scholars. He had discussions with all local scholars who also had to accept him as their new *Guru*. He visited the temples

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and ancient shrines of *Sri Sathari*. From Madura he left for Kuranga where he saw a very old *Vishnu* temple. The saint sat at the feet of *Sri Vishnu* and meditated there for quite sometime. Next he left for Kurukapuri where also he visited the shrine of *Sri Sathari*. There, along with his numerous disciples, the Acharya sang to the glory of *Sri Vishnu*.

The whole party left for Kerala and reached Trivandrum. There he met a number of scholars and the shrine of this city was *Padmanabha Swami*. From there the whole party left for Dwaraka. It was quite a long journey from Trivandrum. The party left for Mathura, Brindavan, Badarika Asharam, Pushkar and finally reached *Sharadapith* of Kashmir. *Sharada* which is known as the Goddess of learning blessed the saint in Kashmir because of his unique interpretation of the *Mantra Kapyasam Pundarikakshsham*. The admirers gave him a new name *Bhasyakar* which means a great interpretor of knowledge. In Kashmir it was not very easy for the saint to convince them and bring them all to his own side. Those who opposed him in Kashmir, it seems, were all suddenly taken seriously ill. They were all going to die. The King of Kashmir thought it was perhaps because of spiritual spell cast by this saint. He came and fell at his feet. He wanted him to save his people. It was really surprising that they were all cured immediately by Ramanuja. After this miraculous event all these people along with their king accepted Ramanuja as their new *Guru*.

It seems Ramanuja had a vision here and was directed to leave for Kashi, the holiest city of the country. There Ramanuja lived for quite sometime and had many spiritual experiences. He had direct contact with many versatile scholars who were simply charmed by his deep knowledge and accepted him as their *Guru*. Then he left for the south again. On way he touched Puri and rested there for few days. It is here that he set up a *Math* and named it as *Embar Math*, after his friend-disciple and cousin Govinda. Here the learned scholar did not like to meet him. They had already heard about him. They were so afraid of him they did not like to come near him. As the saint's biographer records there was a miracle which was almost unbelievable. He says: "Ramanuja grew all the more eager to establish his doctrine there. He requested the priests of Lord *Jagannatha* to worship the

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Deity according to *Pancharatra Agama*. When they refused to adopt any new doctrine, he appealed to the king for arranging a discussion. Being frightened at this, the priests took refuge in *Sri Purushottama*. It is said that, on that night, Ramanuja, while asleep, was thrown by *Jagannatha* to Kurmakshetra a hundred *yojanas* away from that place. When he woke up Ramanuja saw he had come to a different place where none of his numberless disciples was near him. On enquiry he came to know that he was in Kurmokshetra. Knowing for certain that it was an artifice of God, after his morning duties, Ramanuja went to the temple of *Sri Kurmadeva* and with deep devotion worshipped that image of the incarnation. Pleased with him, the Deity commanded him through His priest to wait there for some time for his disciples and Ramanuja complied. Reunited with his disciples after a few days he went to Simhachala. He stayed there for a few days after which he went to the *Ahobila* temple situated on the Garuda Mountain and established a monastery there".

From there Ramanuja left for Tirupathi where a misunderstanding was going on among the followers of *Shiva* and *Vishnu*. Some were saying that Tirupathi was an incarnation of *Vishnu* and some insisted that they were wrong and it was incarnation of *Shiva*.

"Ramanuja, by dint of his superhuman powers, established that the image could be none other than that of *Vishnu* and both the *Vaishnava* and *Shaiva* communities were satisfied".

Ramanuja left for Kanchipuram to see his own favourite shrine *Sri Varadaraja*. After sometime he wanted to touch the holy dust of birth place of *Nathamuni* on his way to Srirangam. Thus it was quite a long journey covered by the entire team of the saint. In the process Ramanuja preached the message of *Bhagawan Vishnu* to thousands of people, convinced hundreds of scholars about the glory of omniscient God.

Everywhere Ramanuja met the masses in public spots and chanted the holy name of *Vishnu* or *Hari* and made them repeat the same. These group mass service was not known to the people. They believed only in ritualistic exercises. They knew worship was restricted only to chanting of *mantras* by the Brahmins only. This was a revolutionary experiment and experience. This way Ramanuja was the forerunner of a new

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movement which flooded whole of India to hundred years later through the great *Bhakti* movement. The seed was swept by Ramanuja. He got religion released from a section of people and opened the door before the lettered and unlettered public. He is the father of *Vaishnava* movement in India and the first to take its preaching in a scientific manner. His *Digvijaya* had a great message for the whole country.

The happy blending of veneration and devotion with love made spiritual pursuit for the ordinary people more easily accessible. The abstract idea of the Absolute is something higher, not easily approachable. It is beyond the comprehension of the ordinary people. Love makes it easier to comprehend. As a person loves his dear ones so he may love God. God realisation comes nearer. This is the first phase of the *Bhakti* movement.

This loving contemplation of God is the greatest contribution of Ramanuja. "It is a continuous process of meditation, till the final goal is reached. This ever growing continuous meditation is promoted by means, including discrimination (*Vivek*), mental detachment (*Vimoha*), practice of meditation (*Abhyasa*), performance of five great sacrifices (*Kriya*), practice of such virtues as truth, non-violence etc. (*Kalyana*), cheerfulness (*Anadasada*) and non-excultation (*Anuddharsha*). Thus promoted, the meditation becomes so perfect as to result in a vivid perception of the supreme. The final intuition of the Supreme is not all a means, but an end itself. The final liberation, which results only after physical dissolution, is constant communion with God which is the consummation of *Karma*, *Jnana* and *Bhakti*".

This was more easily understood by the general public. The door of God realisation which was so long restricted only to a limited few who could concentrate on the Absolute. That is why Ramanuja has been assigned a very high place in the history of Indian philosophy. It is happily recorded about Ramanuja that; "After Sankara, Ramanuja ranks first among the greatest interpreters of *Vedanta*. Sankara's philosophy, though it did afford spiritual comfort to many, did not meet the requirements of all aspirants. There are men in every age who hunger for a God whom they can love, whom they can worship. Now the *Absolute* of Sankara becomes to such men entirely too much of an

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abstraction to be the object of love and worship. It is true that Sankara does reserve a place in his system for a God of love, and there is room in it for devotion to him; but to many his *Iswara* is not wholly satisfying, for they regard him as but a lower aspect of *Brahman*, the Absolute. The Sankara philosophy touches indeed such dizzy heights of abstraction, and at the same time offers such a surpassing degree of spiritnal illumination, that it becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible, for most men either to comprehend it or to accept it. They are therefore inclined to regard this Absolute of Sankara as, in the words of Dr. Radhakrishnan, "a bloodless Absolute dark with the excess of light:".

Sankara had an altogether different role to play. It is not proper to compare these *acharyas*. When the entire Hindu religion was going almost to be erased out of the country and religious values had been replaced by a chaos in thinking and action in daily life, Sankara saved the whole country from this utter confusion.

Ramanuja added cheer to religious practice. Joy in meditation was a new manifestation of spiritual life for the whole society—both the *elite* and the masses.

Ramanujacharya was by and large a saint who cared for the salvation, or moral uplift of the masses rather than his personal *moksha*. There is no doubt that he was an enlightened soul. The vision that he had a number of times, are clear indications of his high spiritual achievement even before he was initiated. His maternal grandfather was a saint of a high order. His parents were deeply inclined towards religious world. The special characteristic of this devoted saint was heightened by his keen desire to bring a reformation among the ordinary people. He felt they needed a definite guideline and was convinced that general God realisation by the masses was more necessary than the personal achievements of individuals. This was revealed in his actions. He was a devoted disciple but did not mince words. He expressed his independent views whenever occasions arose. Sometimes his arguments were so strong and substantial that inspite of his younger age and lesser practical experience spiritual leaders who first did not take him so seriously too were mellowed at his depth of vision and power

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of grasping subtler things so quickly. They could not brush him aside.

The main contribution of Ramanuja in the domain of Indian philosophy has been *Vishistadvaita* as distinguished from Sankaracharya's *Advaita* philosophy. This *Vishistadvaita* philosophy is an attempt "to develop a complete system which synthesizes the concept of God with philosophy of the impersonal Absolute". It was perhaps not a new philosophy. Ramanuja does not claim any originality either. As has been rightly observed; "He was the culmination of the movement that started from the *Vedas* and was nourished by the *Alvars* Nathamuni and Yamunacharya. Ramanuja's genius and supreme efforts resulted in the systematic presentation of *Vishistadvaita* which emphasises the spiritual experience of God without ignoring the critical methods of philosophy". According to Prof. Keith, "The *Sribhashya*, his commentary on the *Brahma-Sutras* conveys an impression of no mean philosophical insight, and it is fair to assume that his work in substantial merit and completeness far outdid any previous effort to find in the *Brahma-Sutras* a basis for monotheism."

In his approach to God realisation the saint paid highest attention and importance to *Bhakti*. *Bhakti* according to Ramanuja "is not a mere devout meditation but a loving contemplation of God".

Even a top sacred thing like the *mantra* by the *Guru* which is supposed to be a closely guarded secret was not a personal thing to him. He made it a public thing. It is recorded: "While he was a monk at Srirangam, Ramanuja became extremely popular, and many aspirants gathered round him. But still he remained unsatisfied. Now there was living at that time another saint, whose name was Goshthipurna. Ramanuja went to him and reverently begged to be initiated. Six times he went to him and six times he was refused. At last, however, seeing Ramanuja's earnest devotion Goshthipurna initiated him with a holy *mantra*, a name of God, but warned him that he must never give that *mantra* to anyone, for if he did he would be damned, while whoever heard the sacred words would attain salvation. Upon hearing this Ramanuja went at once into the temple, gathered a crowd around him and uttered the holy *mantra* '*Om Namo Narayanaya*' in the hearing of all. Goshthi-

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purna pretended to be very angry and rebuked him for his disobedience, but Ramanuja replied 'If by my damnation so many can be saved, damnation is my supreme desire.' Pleased, the saint answered, "Because of your great love for humanity, the philosophy of *Vishistadvaita* shall henceforth be known as the *Ramanuja* philosophy".

As *Sri Hanuman* is regarded as an incarnation of devotion to Sri Rama in the *Ramayana* so too Ramanujacharya is recorded by millions as an incarnation of Lakshmana, the younger brother of Rama who left everything, including the wife Urmila and the luxurious life in the royal palace in Ayodhya, just to serve Rama, the elder brother, whom he regarded as an incarnation of *Narayana*, Ramanuja had surrendered himself completely at the feet of *Narayana*. He had the *mantra* from his illustrious *Guru* or *Narayana*. He made no secret of it and accepted that great symbol of *Vishnu* as the idol of his heart.

Sankara had been a worshipper of *Shiva*. He had composed innumerable *stotras* in praise of *Shiva* which are repeated even today in millions of houses and thousands of temples throughout the world.

Ramanuja used to worship *Vishnu* and was the forerunner of a new wave of *Vaishnavism* throughout the country. This wave touched the length and breadth of India and today is covering even many countries abroad. He honoured the title given to him by his saintly maternal uncle "who expected him to equal the great Lakshmana in his devotion to the Lord". *Ramanuja* means younger brother of Rama, that is, Lakshmana.

"The *Summum bonum* of Sri Ramanuja's life was the service of the Lord *Narayana*. When, out of conceit, the base-natured leaders of society had robbed the human hearts of devotion to God, even as Sita was kidnapped by Ravana, then Sri Ramanuja, like the true younger brother of Sri Rama, fought to the end with the heretics for the recovery of the Sita of devotion and was ultimately successful in his mission. By installing *Sri* on the flank of *Narayana*, he brought back the goddess of fortune into the unfortunate land of India. In establishing the eternal relation of *Narayana* with *Sri*, he has only proved the word of Maharshi Valmiki."

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Thus, complete surrender to God, as propounded, preached and practised by Ramanujacharya was also a novelty in the approach to God realisation. Devotion leads to the final goal no doubt, but complete surrender which also covers the qualification of deep devotion and a step forward and complete surrender to the Almighty, is the easiest way to God realisation. Many later great saints experimented this in their lives and God realisation was made easier for the laity also in their spiritual recommendation. This incidentally does not contradict the inner thoughts of the greatest Hindu scripture, The *Geeta*. There, too, Sri Krishna says, "forgetting everything else whoever surrenders him to me I take his full charge-*Yogakshema bahamyahang*." The most significant aspect of this approach to God realisation is the deep touch of humility. This leads a devotee to *dosya bhava*. One thinks one self only as a servant of the supreme being. This tremendously helps one to get rid of the ego which is contradicting to God-realisation. Pretension knowledge, pride of prosperity and wealth can never lead any one near God. This was the keynote to the preachings of the later *Bhakti* spiritual leaders, like Mahaprabhu Sri Krishna Chaitanya, who said "He, who deems himself lower than even a blade of grass, is patient like a tree; does not have honour for himself but is always eager to offer it to others-he alone is fit to chant the name of *Hari*.

Treenadapi sunichena
Taroriba sahisnuna
Amanina manadena kcertaneeya
Sada Hari

This is the after-effect and final consummation of the deep feeling with which Ramanuja left the devotees completely attached to his theory of God realisation, known as *Prapatti*.

Sri Ramakrishna very frequently used to compare the devotees loyally surrendering themselves completely at the mercy of the Mother like the kitten who leaves itself at the mercy of the mother cat.

This theory of *Prapatti* is something different from the concept of devotion. This is a step forward towards surrendering oneself before God. This covers devotion and adds

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further the spirit of humility. Even in love there may be the touch of ego. I love God. I offer my love to Him. But when the question of complete surrender comes the element of ego is eliminated. As propounded by Ramanuja, "*Prapatti*, is absolute self-surrender to the Supreme, involving complete conformity, avoidance of opposition, the confidence of protection, the choosing of the Divine as the saviour, and surrender of one's self to God in all meekness. This implies complete surrender of 'I' and 'mine' to God. This sincere and complete transfer of spiritual responsibility to the Supreme liberates an aspirant at once from human efforts and foibles and creates the condition for the flow of the divine grace. When a person sacrifices his ego at the altar of the Supreme, the Lord Himself steps forward to receive him. *Prapatti* is usually prescribed as the direct means for those who feel incompetent in the classical pathway of meditative *Bhakti* and too impatient to wait for the perfection of *Bhaktl.* It may be noted here that *Bhakti* and *Prapatti* are not antagonistic to each other as some people think. In *Bhakti* there is always an element of surrender involves an aspect of *Bhakti.* The predominence of one or the other element in spiritual practice determines whether the path is *Bhakit* or *Prapatti*".

This is the easiest way of salvation. But easiest only to those who are clear-hearted, simple honest and have a great desire from the core of their heart for God-realisation. A half-hearted soul cannot just cling to *Prapatti* and wait for salvation.

One of the most brilliant topics in Indian philosophy is on the comparative study between Sankara and Ramanuja. There is no end to material on this subiect. These two had been the greatest exponents of *Vedanta.* Both were deeply learned. Both were enlightened souls. Both were devoted to their mission.

Both Sankara and Ramanuja had been *Prabhus* of *Sampradayas.* Both had tremendous mass contact. Both made long journeys on pilgrimage and on spreading their missions. Both rejuvenated Indian philosophy and Hindu religion.

Sankara had a short span of life. He lived only for thirty-two years. Ramanuja had a comparatively longer life. He lived for one hundred and twenty years.

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Both Sankara and Ramanuja were not only great scholars and enlightened souls, both were great organisers. Both founded innumerable *maths* with dedicated mendicants to preach and practise the message of *Vedanta*. Modern India is equally indebted to both. Swami Vivekananda saw a harmony in the works of the two and represented and an echo of both in his soul-stirring messages of *Vedanta*. Sri Ramakrishna practised both *Advaita* and *Vishistadvaita* ways of meditation. *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* in the *Advaita* way got him equal bliss and in the *Vishistadvaita* way of personal relationship and equation with God.

What is the description of God by Ramanuja? How does he present Him before us? Ramanuja defines God as "the repository of infinite, noble and blessed qualities" and as one "not only differentiating himself into the cosmos but remaining absolutely distinct from it". He insists, "He is its stuff and soul". The saint says "*Brahman*, then is related to the cosmos as the soul is related to the body. As a man has a soul and a body, and as the soul, though distinct from the body, yet controls and guides it, lives in it, and uses it as an instrument, similarly *Brahman* is the soul of the universe, the source and sustenance of all beings within it, and the ruler over all". In this body and-soul connection between *Brahman* and the cosmos are included the three relations defined by Ramanuja, "*adhara* and *adheyo*—support and the supported; *niyamaka* and *niyamya*—the controller and the controlled; *sesin* and *sesa*—the Lord and his servant".

On the other hand Sankara "laid great stress upon *jnana yoga*, the path of knowledge", but Ramanuja laid stress upon *Bhakti yoga*, the path of love. Both these saintly philosophers admit the need of love and devotion as well as the need of knowledge : only Sankara preaches love as a means to knowledge and Ramanuja preaches love as both means and end. Ramanuja, on the other hand, admits knowledge as a means to love, whereas Sankara insists that knowledge is both "means and end". I do not believe that there exists, after all, any real difference between their explanations of the means. Swami Vivekananda declares it as a distinction without much difference. "When Ramanuja speaks of knowledge as a means, he has in mind not transcendental knowledge but intellectual

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analysis; and when Sankara speaks of love as a means, he has reference to an inferior form of worship. "Each seems", says Swami Vivekananda, "to lay a great stress upon his own particular method of worship, forgetting that with perfect love true knowledge is bound to come, even unsought, and that from perfect knowledge true love is inseparable".

Ramanuja argues that "God and the souls of men are not the same though they are not separate from each other, and that the highest ideal and the ultimate goal are to love worship God and ourselves utterly and completely to him. The material world and human beings, though different, have a real existence of their own as the body of *Brahman*, who is their soul and controlling power. Apart from *Brahman* they are literally nonentities." So Ramanuja's philosophy is known as" *Vishistadvaita*—that is, *advaita, nondualism*, with *visesa* or qualifications—because it admits the plurality both of matter and of souls".

Ramanuja gives his original interpretation of *Vedanta*. To him the theory of *Advaita* that *Brahman* is absolute does not hold good. To him it is relative together with *Paramapurusa*. He welcomes, rather emphasies the existence of *Paramaprakriti*, the eternal power which is *Shakti*.

God is not the combination of evil and good. To him He is only good.

Many great scholars have analysed the two masterly interpretations of *Vedanta* by Ramanuja and Sankara. For the lay person, perhaps the interpretation of Ramanuja is the easiest because of its easier approach. God dwells in the devotee's heart and by a long yearning, love and keen desire one may get Him unfolded and manifested in one's heart itself. To him God is personal, relative and easily accessible through love. He is emotionally nearer God realisation than Sankara. A brilliant comparative analyses by the biographer of the Acharya in brief mentions the main points of differences between the two great saints.

According to Sankara, knowledge is self-luminous, light itself. It illumines objects of knowledge, and is therefore apart from and beyond the relation of subject and object. Relative knowledge is not true knowledge; it is not pure consciousness, though grounded upon it. Knowledge, by itself, is absolute.

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It is the *Atman*, light itself. Relative knowledge is infinite knowledge made finite.

Ramanuja, on the other hand, does not take into consideration knowledge that is self-luminous and absolute. Knowledge (declares) is always relative, and in it there is always a distinction between subject and object. In short, Ramanuja deos not admit *nirvikalpa samadhi*, the unitary consciousness, the experience of the Self as one with *Brahman*. He was at heart a *bhakta*, a devotee, who preserved his distinction from *Brahman* in order to enjoy the bliss of divine love. In consequence, his philosophy is one of devotion, although, being based on careful reasoning, it is not merely emotional in its nature.

One other point of difference between the two great philosophers should be noted. What Sankara calls *maya* which is neither real nor unreal, and which, when joined to Brahman, the Absolute, *attributes and impersonal* becomes the personal *Iswara*, or God, Ramanuja calls *Shakti* or power which in its nature is real and eternally coexistent with *Brahman*. Thus Ramanuja does not accept the impersonal, attributeless *Brahman* of Sankara, but rather an eternal personal *Brahman*, the repository of all blessed qualities.

Both draw their inspiration from the same sources *Upanishads*. Both Sankara and Ramanuja give a clearer or perhaps much simpler version of God much more easily accessible, The stricter drill of a higher process of meditation on *Brahman* without a form is avoided by Ramanuja. He places before all an image of *Vishnu*, a symbol of whatever is good in the world. This is easy, Those who have no faith in idolatry or image may appreciate to understand the real significance of this practice.

In the Indian schools when a child was introduced to the letters, the teacher used to inscribe on plam leaves the letters by a nail. The child had to practise on them. After some time when the practie was thorough the child could write on plam leaves without the letters being inscribed by the teacher. Similarly an image before one's eyes helps in concentration. After fully concentrating on the ideal idol for some time one may practise without any image. That was also prescribed by the greatest saint of modern India, Sri Ramakrishna to Swami

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Vivekananda when the latter asked him to help him in his spiritual experiences. So an analysis of *Vedanta* by both will be interesting. A deeper study by Swami Prabhavananda gives a clearer idea about the approaches by both Sankara and Ramanuja. The Swami, after studying both in depth, tells us :

Brahman is determinate and can therefore be defined by a statement of his essential attributes. In the words of the *Upanisads*, 'Brahman is *satyam* or real, *jnanam* or conscious, and *anantam* or infinite Sankara does not consider these as attributes of *Brahman*. But Ramanuja accepts them as essential.

Brahman is the basis of all existence, and since He is the supreme god. He is also the supreme goal. The universe is composed of *cit*, the sentient, and *acit*, the nonsentient. *Cit* and *acit* have their source in *Brahman*, and He is the indwelling Self within all and the ruler of all.

Brahman is both the first cause and the final cause of the universe of the sentient and the nonsentient. '*Brahman* wills to be many', we read in *Upanisads*, and he divides himself into the manifold universe of the living and of the nonliving. This fact does not mean, however, that the act of creation had an absolute beginning in time. The universe as explained by all systems of Indian thought, alternates between the phases of involution and evolution. In the phase of involution it remains latent in *Brahman*, and creation or evolution is the actualization of the latent. The one becomes the many, not in the pantheistic sense of emanation, but in the sense that *Brahman* by exercise of his will, evolves the twenty-four categories of *jivas*, or individual souls. *Brahman* is the material as well as the efficient cause of the universe. 'From Him the universe has emerged, in Him it exists, and unto Him it returns'. 'As the web comes out of the spider and is withdrawn, as plants grow from the soil and hair from the body of man, so springs the universe from the eternal *Brahman*'. God, as the source and support of the universe, has transformed Himself into the cosmic manifold; and He is the indwelling Self in his creation, the ruler and the director of the cosmsc process. The evilis that the universe contains are the results, of the *karma* of individuals, for whom God is the

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dispenser of the law. He himself, remains unaffected by evil, and is forever absolutely good.

Of course both insist on meditation in clear heart and single-minded devotion. All weakness, imperfections and impurities have to be shun.

Both have prescribed transcendental meditation for real heavenly bliss. Meditation is nothing but self-search and generating energy within oneself. The concentrated generated energy may do miracles. This is another explanation of will force theory. A person who concentrates for some time on the Infinite or the idol cannot only generate tremendous spiritual power, he can transmit a lot to others too. That was true in the cases of both Sankara and Ramanuja. Both of them transmitted deep spiritual power through their disciples. This they had to acquire by constant meditation. Their *modus operandi* might have been different.

"So long as man, owing to his imperfections imposed by *Karma*, is crippled in knowledge, *Brahman* may not be revealed to him. But after he has been purified, he may have immediate intuition of God. This immediate intuition is not the highest transcendental consciousness described in the *Upanisads* and by Sankara as *Turiya*, and as *nirvikalpa samadhi* by the *yogis*, but rather it is transcendental experience of God in which there still remains the ego as distinct from him. The experience is described as meditation and devotion. This revelation of God in meditation possesses a self-certifying character, and further, the fact that God is so reveled in the heart of man is borne witness to by the seers and saints of the *Upanisads*, as well as by the saints and seers of all ages and in all lands".

"The only aim of a man's life should be God-realisation", said all the saints of India from all regions and all faiths. They all agreed on this important point. The path finders agree that life becomes useless without a search for the divine light. "The ways are different but the goal is the same", says the *Upanishad*. It is only the intellectuals who will differ. That is quite possible, probable and reasonable. There must be truth in all these experiments because each one of them gave their messages only after enlightenment after deep meditation.

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Ramanuja gave a definite direction to God-realisation. "Like all true saints and philosophers, Ramanuja held that God can be known and realised, that a vision of his being is possible for man, and that man must strive to attain it. And he realised, like all saints, that the vision of God is vouchsafed to man by God Himself out of His infinite love and grace". God's favour is essential. Without his *Karma* nothing is possible in this world.

Added to it must be one's ceaseless efforts. Self-effort and divine grace are not opposed to each other; neither is divine grace conditional. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, the breeze of divine grace is blowing, but we must set sail to catch it. In the same way Ramanuja explains how we must love God, serve him, and meditate on him, and then as spiritual hunger grows within us, we experience love and divine grace flowing from him and flooding our whole being. "The culmination of spiritual experience", he says", is then realising God's unbounded love and finding complete refuge in Him. To find completete refuge in Him is the ideal of self-surrender, of *Prapatti*, which is not extinction of self, but rather a union of our will with the will of God".

Ramanuja insists that great devotees may have this *Bhakti* on their own. This will be there effortlessly but their member will be only a limited few. That may be due to their previous *Karma* or *Praravda*. For the rest, who have to depend on their efforts, this spirit of *Bhakti* is a matter to be cultivated.

Bhakti being a higher form of emotion, it needs elevation of mind to higher values of life. There the first code of conduct is the preparation of the mind to accept this high quality of perception. One has to purify the body and the mind. Mind can be purified by keeping the body away from certain hazards of growth in the right direction. This needs constant thinking of noble things—which is a positive action. In the negative side, one has to forget and forego certain sensuous things. One can practise certain drills in the ordinary day-to-day life. Food habit, for instance, is one such ordinary, at the same time, a very important factor, which purifies a mind. One has to be strictly truthful. All saints have stressed this point. Like Lord Buddha's *Noble Eightfold Path*, Acharya

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Ramanuja also prescribes certain minimum codes. In brief, they may be described as follows :

With respect to the method and means of attaining *Bhakti*, Ramanuja remarks : "Its attainment comes through discrimination, control of the passion, habitual practice of religious disciplines, sacrificial work, purity, strength and suppression of excessive joy.

By discrimination is meant the distinguishing, among other things, of good food from bad. Body being interrelated, purity of food is important especially for the beginners, because it enables them to think pure thoughts.

Control of the passions is the strengthening of the will and its guidance towards meditation on the Lord. 'By practice and non-attachment is to be attained'.

Sacrificial work refers to the five great sacrifices mention in the *Vedas*.

Purity is both external and internal. In the list of qualities conducive to purity, Ramanuja enumerates the following : *satya*, truthfulness, *arjava*, sincerity, *daya*, doing good to others, *ahimsa*, non injury; *abhidya* non covetousness, not thinking vain thoughts, not brooding over injuries received from others.

Strength is vigour of mind.

Lastly is suppression of execessive joy. "Excessive joy fritters away the energies of the mind, and yet we must be cheerful".

This drill is the keynote to success. Without this regular practice or *abhyasa* it is not possible for any ordinary devotee to attain God realisation.

A tremendous spiritual strength generate once a person follows the above drill. Joy is the final goal and yet an excess of that in ordinary life is to be avoided. Only the joy of God realisation is genuine and when one attains that one becomes calm and quiet. That is the stage of *Satchidananda*.

God is all prevailing. Ramanuja says "the entire universe evolves out of *Prakriti* under the will of God and is under His control. Prakriti is the seat of soul and indirectly through it, of God".

Everything is happening in this universe because God wills so.

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What is man ? What is an ordinary soul ? What are the final goals of a human life ? What is the correlation between man and God ?

Acharya Ramanuja himself raises these questions and he himself replies to them also. Man comes to the world due to his past deeds. He has many attractions and desires. The wisest of them longs to have enlightenment or *moksha*. Those who are attached too much to worldly things are under bondage. They are ordinary human beings. To the second lot belong those who have no attachment to worldly things. They are without bondage. They belong to the second highest category—*Nitya*. The highest category of coarse is reserved for those who have reached the stage of release from transmigration. They are not to be born again. They are *mukta*.

"Soul is a mode of God. It is entirely dependent upon him though distinct from Him. It also constitutes His body, since He is the Soul of souls and inner controller. It is of the essence of consciousness and bliss. It is not a fabricated complex, but an eternal reality, a *Karta* (doer) and a *khota* (experiencer). The souls are many and there is no difference among them as far as their essential nature is concerned. The soul is monadic in nature. In its natural state, its attributable consciousness expands and is able to apprehend everything. But in *Samara*, as a result of its past *Karma*, its consciousness consracts, though never absent. The contraction of consciousness and bliss is itself *Kamsara*, and expansion of the same through constant communion with God is itself *Moksha*. The souls are of three kinds: those that are ever free and never experience bondage (*Nitya*), those that have attained release from transmigration (*Mukta*) and those that are still in *Samsara*.

As a devotee has deep yearning for the divine company so is the All-powerful Almighty equally eager to meet His devotees. He appears before His devotees in many wrys. The great creator unfolds Himself through His own forms and funs. Different sages and seers have described this wonderful feats of divine kindness in different ways. Their interpretations, too, are different. One common link is the consensus

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that God lives in all human hearts. A man's heart is the dwelling temple of God.

In his clear-cut explanation and exposition of the matter, Acharya Ramanuja gives different stages of God rcalisation. The analysis is so lucid and practical oriented that no philosopher, howsoever scholarly, can give this step-by-step description unless he has realised knowledge. In this interesting analysis the *acharya* also explains the importance of roles of the Godmen who come from time to time as *avataras* or incarnations of God.

In all the different steps of God realisation, the saint describes the limitless kindness, compassion or *Karuna* of the Almighty.

"In the theology of Ramanuja, which is an inheritance from the ancient *Bhagavata* school, God manifests Himself in five forms. The first is the highest (*para*), in which is *Fera-brahman* or *Narayana*. He dwells in the domain of *Nitya-vibhuti*. The second form of manifestation is known as *Vyuha* which is fourfold : *Vasudeva*, *Sankarshana*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruudha*. These are the forms of instruction, creation etc. assumed for purpose of worship by the devotees. The third is *Vibhava* in which the Supreme munifests Himself as *Avataras*. The fourth manifestation is *Antaryamin*, in which He dwells in the heart of all embodied beings as their friend. The last is called *Arca* in which the Deity dwells in consecrated images. In all thesc manifestations, the chief purpose is to help the erring souls, by His unsurpassable love and compassion".

The Acharya identifies clearly the *avataras* or incarnations of God as manifestations of God. This is subtly different from the normal descriptions of Godmen. There they are described generally as representatives of God. Acharya categorically describes an *avatara* as the direct manifestation of the Supreme. The Almighty is the only saviour of human beings. And that is possible only through constant prayers.

This great Almighty, creator of the universe, who pervades everything is described by Ramanuja as the Absolute. He is both the cause and effect of creation. Everything has been created at His Supreme Will. He is also the cause of destruction.

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The beauty of the conception of God by Ramanuja is the happy blending of the highest thoughts of *Upanishads* as well as that of *Bhagavat*. The touch of the ancient sages and seers that *Sachidananda Brahman* is the one and the only manifestation of God is accepted by the saint. At the same time the *Bhagavat* concept of God, the compassionate one who is the final resort, the only shelter of human being is prominently upheld in the realisation of God sense. The tremendous influence of the *Karma* theory is prevalent too in the divine thoughts centring round God realisation.

Ramanuja's ideas of God being clear-cut and his prescription for God realisation being comparatively easier to practise by ordinary human beings, commands great popularity. At the same time he gives the prescription of God realisation even for the highest sages and seers in more difficult way. The choice is there for the devotee. Those who do not believe in rituals may also back on having God realisation either through *Bhakti* or *Prapatti*.

"God is the absolute Reality, endowed with all auspicious and excellent attributes which are unsurpassable. He too is of the nature of consciousness and bliss, all powerful, ali pervading all-compassionate. He is the inner ruler of matter as well as souls. God with souls and matter as His body constitutes an organic unity, sustaining and controlling them for His purpose. Since God cannot be separated from His modes or attributes, He is determinate and not indeterminate. God possesses two states as cause and effect. In the state of cosmic dissolution (*Pralaya*), which occurs at the end of a *Kalpa*, matter and souls exit in a subtle state possessing none of the qualities which make them objects of experience or cognizing subjects. Brahman in this subtle body is said to be in causal state. From this subtle, state, creation evolves by the will of God. Subtle matter developes into gross form, soul expand their consciousness, entering into connection with the bodies appropriate to their past *Karma*. In this gross condition *Brahman* is said to be in the state of effect. Thus God is the material cause as well as the efficient cause of the universe. This change of body from subtle to gross state does not affect the nature of God because it is His body that

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undergoes modification, while as the soul of the cosmic body, He remains unchanged. Thus the self-determining *Iswara* is the Absolute of Ramanuja".

The story of the life of Ramanuja reads like a thriller. Besides spiritual knowledge, one comes across many miraculous events. Ramanuja escaped death a number of times. In his historic life, he had a large number of followers no doubt. But he had very powerful enemies. They hatched plots to get him killed on a number of occasions. Strangely enough he was saved each time miraculously by divine power. Except in the case of Prahlad, the great devotee whom his own father who was a king, wanted to get killed by the feet of elephant or throwing from mountain tops and each time who was saved by the Lord, there is hardly any character who was protected so many times by divine power from immediate physical elimination.

First, Ramanuja's own *Guru* Yadavaprakash, seriously hatched a plot to kill him. He was saved by Govinda and finally by both *Narayana* and *Lakshmi* who came in the garb of fowler couple. A long distance of six month's journey was covered through their spiritual spell by one night.

Secondly, the *chola* emperor who did not like the spread of *Vaishnavism.* Ramanuja saved himself by escaping with his disciples to Karnataka where the *Hoysala* royal couple accepted him as their *Guru.* He was not only saved, he could carry the message of his Master to the whole of Karnataka through his divine grace.

The third occasion was in his headquarters at the temple of Ranganath in Srirangam. Ramanuja was exceedingly happy to have received the assignment of looking after the shrine of Ranganath at Srirangam. He thought it was a rare opportunity for him to offer his prayers to the deity. He had no other desire. But there were a series or professional priests as is so common in big temples even today. The chief priest did not like him. Ramanuja was certainly not his rival. But the foolish fellow thought he was being ignored by the public only because of the presence of Ramanuja. He wanted social prestige, glory and honour of a big *Guru* but none cared for him. So he hatched a plan like Yadavaprakash to kill Ramanuja. He invited Ramanuja who had to live only on alms,

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bhiksha or *prasad*, at the temple only. The priest told him to have his *bhiksha* from his house. He was not a mendicant. Professional priests need not be monks. It is not mandatory on them to embrace celibacy. He told his wife about his intention and explained that as long as Ramanuja was alive it was impossible for bim to get the full prestige and honour. The old lady's assistance was solicited. She had to mix up poison in food in his presence.

The priest went to offer his prayers in the temple. But the mendicant reached his host a little early. The old priest asked him to go ahead with his lunch. Meanwhile the priest's wife did not know what to do. There was a storm in her mind. What a young bright *Yogi*, almost like her son. The old man had no heart. She asked him finally to run away. She told him everything. Ramanuja was saved.

The priest would not leave him so easily. So, another day he mixed poison in *charanamrita*, the sacred water touched by the feet of the deity, and offered the same to Ramanuja. With great joy Ramanuja drank it and was in ecstasy. The fool thought the saint would now die soon. But encirling him were hundreds of admirers who started *kirtana* and the enlightened one was on a blissful state.

The priest realised his mistake. He was trying to kill one who was not an ordinary human being. He fell at his feet and asked for his pardon. Ramanuja did not know even what was happening. He was in an altogether different world.

Ramanuja was a master organiser. He wanted to send the message of *Vaishnavism* to the far remote villages. For this he appointed seventy-four spiritual leaders who organised discussion on and spread of *Vishistadvaita*. They had to explain the whole thing in a very easy manner. "He divided the *Vaishnava* world into a number of *Acharayic* process, over each of which he appointed a pious householder as the head or *simhasanadhipati* as he was called".

He had set up a number of centres of *Vaishnavism*. He already had made Tirupati a permanent centre of *Vaishnavism*.

The main reason of his tremendous success as an organiser was because of his deep affectionate heart and his compassion for all. His biographers, time and again, mention and vividly

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describe, "the excellence af his heart" and "the sympathy he displayed towards fellow men".

Another revolutionary change introduced by Acharya Ramanuja was by-passing of caste system. He ignored caste system and was much above the orthodox practice. It is also recorded in contemporary biography that "he is said to have risen above caste and status, and had non-*Brahamana* disciples like Pillai Urangavillidasa. He gave them a place in *Vaishnavism* by allowing them to wear sect marks, to dress themselves like *Vaishnavas*, to imitate their custom and habits and to study the *Prabandham*. It was not an ordinary relaxation. The saint did not depart from the traditional convention in his interpretation of *Vedanta* in *Sribhasya*. *Sribeasya* and the the saints' other writings "indicate a thoroughly *Bramanical* exclusiveness which is not consistent attributed to him by the legends; but the *Prabandhan*, the temple festivals, the sect marks, and the methods of life afforded ample opportunities for the democratization of *Vashnavism* without violating or infringing the sacred institutions of *Vedic* puritanism".

Vaishhavism, like any flood of new faith was not spared of wrath by the ruling authority. Ramanuja too was not spared by the *chola* ruler Kulothunga. Kamanuja had to shift to Karnataka where the Hoysala ruler Bitti Vishnubardhana left *Jainism* and embraced *Vaishnavism*. The royal patronage helped Ramanuja to spread *Vaishnavism en masse*. The non-*Brahmins* in particular got a new saviour in the saint.

Ramanuja waited for some time till the persecution of *Vaishnavas* by the *cholas* was over. When their atrocity became less, Ramanuja returned to the sacred headquaters at Srirangam. He started his mission in the interior of villages. His learned disciples and the *acharyas* took up the task with new vigour. Now it became a bigger organiser after the spread of *Vaishnavism* among the neighbouring *Hoysala* regions and the patronage of the emperor there.

Ramanuja's *Vishistadvaita* has been described by hundreds of scholars, discussed by millions and followed by hundred *Vedanta* is a scientific philosophy. It does not believe in any speculation on God. "*Vishistadvaita* relies on the valid knowledge given in sense, perception, inference and revealation

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and affirms the truth that Brahman is the ground of all existence and the goal of all experience is the first and the final cause of all things".

Ramanuja's influence on Indian culture and philosophy has been so tremendous and his impact so deep-rooted, because he was a pioneer among the path-finders who could say, "here you are, I can get you a vision of God". His main contribution "*Vishistadvaita* guarantees God and salvation to all finite beings—human, sub-human and celestial. It is therefore a religion of harmony and hospitality. It does not stops with affirming the fatherhhod of God and the brotherhood of man. It goes a step further and asserts that God is the inner life and soul of all beings. Its idea of God as the soul of the world brings out the immence of God in all beings, spiritual intimacy and the goodness of God. As every *Jiva* is being with *Brahman*, the realization of the absolute is a real possibility". The catholicity of Ramanuja is "God is immanent in all faiths for the purpose of cosmic redemption inspires the feeling that the God of all religions is ultimately one, though the seers and sects may give expression to Him in different ways".

According to Dr. Rangacharya, "The *Vaishnava* philosophy as expounded by Ramanuja in his *Sribhasya* is less intellectual and more emotional than the philosophy of Sankara. Again, while Sankara taught unrealism, Ramanuja was an advocate of realism. A further point of contrast is that one is for a pantheistic neuter *Brahman*, while the other advocates a personal deity possessed of all auspicious attributes and capable of giving salvation to devotees in reward for their devotion. Lastly, the individuality of the *Jiva* is preserved in Ramanuja's system even after *moksha*, while it is lost in *Brahman* according to *Advaita*. It is true that, so far as practical life is concerned Sankara's *Saguna Brahman* theory provides for a life of devotion; but Ramanuja advocates this for the realization of *moksha* itself, Sankara regards it as secondary to the intellectual method of meditation, which brings complete identity with *Brahman*. Ramanuja's doctrine regarding the soul's innate dependence on God's grace and its getting salvation through devotion, and his insistence on the reality of existence, in contrast to Sankara's advocacy of

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the phenomenal (*uyavaharika*) existence through *Maya* appeals to minds which are not satisfied with the teachings of *Advaita*".

Ramanuja knew death was near by intuition. He directed the more important of his disciples Kurukesa, Pranatartihara, Varadavishnu and Dasarathi to take charge of the organisation. They were also authorised to interpret *Vedanta*. Kurukesa was nominated to head the organisation after his domise.

The energetic admirers, disciples and friends insisted on erecting his statue in the temple hall at Srirangam. He agreed to their request. He was a symbol of love. To him the followers were like his children. They wanted the saint to embrace the statue so that by his touch it becomes lively and sacred. He readily obliged them. In his life time another statue of the saint was installed at Sriperumbudur which was touched by him and purified.

Ramanuja passed away in 1137 AD at the ripe age of one hundred and twenty.

Among the *Vaishnavas* he was the greatest and perhaps one of the greatest saints of the whole country. It has been rightly observed, "What he was in life, he has been after death—a prince of devotees ever standing in the presence of his Lord and contemplating Him. No *Vaishnava* temple is considered perfect without his image, no festival proper without the celebration of his greatness and no ceremonial occasion adequately solemn without the invocation of his blessing and favour".

Acharya Ramanuja died as *Bhagawan* Ramanuja.

Ramanuja passed away with full consciousness on a Saturday noon. It was the tenth day of the birght half of the winter month of January 1137 AD (*Magha*, 1059 *Saka*).

The last sense was very touching. He called all his disciples whom he had been loving more than he loved himself. "My children this is my second self. There is no difference whatsoever between this and mayself casting this worn-out body aside. Here I go to reside in this new body". The saint was showing the statute in the temple.

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"So saying, Ramanuja, the large-hearted one, kept his head on the lap of *Govinda* and his two lotus feet on that of Andhrapurna, and looking at the two wooden sandals of his own *Guru* placed before him, entered into the supreme realm of the feet of Lord *Vishnu*".

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ACHARYA NIMBARKA

(11th Century AD)

Immediately after Ramanujacharya, appeared on the spiritual realm another great *Vaishnava* Saint, Nimbarkacharya who was born in a *Tailanga Brahmin* family in South India, probably in Bellary district. Nimbarka, a *Vaishnava* in true sense, had spent all his life in Brindavan. He had a large following who form a distinguished sect among the worshipers of *Sri Vishnu* as *Radha-Krishna*. His followers are popularly known as *Sanka Sampradaya* and are mainly in Northern India which was the field of his spiritual activity although he was a Telugu speaking monk.

The main message of Nimbarka in *Vaishnava* philosophy is that "Radha was the eternal consort of *Vishnu*, and was incarnated like Him in Brindavan. There is also a suggestion, though not a clear statement, she became the wife of her Lord".

This is a basic distinction between Nimbarka and other South Indian *Vaishnava* saints. The *Vaishnavas* in South India "laid stress on the cowherd element of *Krishna* and altogether ignored *Radha*. Nimbarka was the first to put *Vaishnavism* in North India on a systematic philosophic basis."

Bhagwan Nimbarka Swami was disciple of Maharsi Narada. His real name was Niyamananda Swami. It is really interesting that the Saint's real name has totally gone into the background after a miraculous hospitable feat. He was an extremely generous and hospitable soul. All Indians are. That is one of the finest qualities of Indian tradition.

One evening, quite a number of *yati* guests came to the *ashram* of the Saint. It was almost sunset. The Saint produced a big quantity of good food and served them. But the guests would not touch them because they were not used to taking food after dusk. The Acharya climbed a *Nimba* tree in front of his *ashram*. He brought *Sri Krishna's Sudarshan Chakra* by prayer. His deep spiritual power could change the whole

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atmosphere. It looked like a day. The *Chakra* worked as sun. The guests agreed to take food. Immediately after they had finished their meal, the Saint returned the *Sudarshan Chakra* to his dear deity. So it again became dark and to their deepest astonishment the guest-monks discovered that the night was almost over. These learned guest-monks called him as *Nimbaditya—Nimba* is that tree and *aditya*, the Sun. Through *yogic* power he could hold the sun standing on the *Nimba* tree. From *Nimbaditya*, the popular version came to Nimbarka.

His disciples are known as the *Nimbarka* group of *Vaishnavas*. They are known also as *Hans Sampradaya* or *San Sampradaya*. The anecdotes are from *Vishnu Puran*. Nimbarka's followers exclusively worship *Sri Vishnu*. Nimbarka is worshipped as one of the five founders of main schools of *Vaishnava* thoughts. *Vaishnavism*, that is *Vedanta* in its devotional aspect, was mainly having four schools and a fifth one was added by Sri Chaitanya. "There are four chief schools of *Vaishnavism* (*Vedanta* in its devotional aspect) : *Sri*, of which Ramanuja is the principal exponent; *Sanaka*, founded by Nimbarka in the eleventh century; *Brahma*, founded by Madhva in the twelfth century; *Rudra*, founded by Vallabha in the sixteenth century. To these should be added the Bengal *Vaishnavist* school, whose founder was Sri Chaitanya, Prophet of Nadia."

Nimbarka was one of the greatest Saints of India according to contemporary philosophers. "His philosophy is a compromise between those of Ramanuja and Madhva, as he believes God to be both identical with and distinct from, the individual spirit. But his chief difference from his predecessor Ramanuja lies in substituting the old and pure *bhakti* (devotion) for *upasana*, meditation) and giving prominence to the elements of *Krishna* and *Radha*. Nimbarka worshipped only *Krishna* and his consort to the exclusion of other God. He thus discarded the *Samuccaya* doctrine followed by the *Sri Vaishnavas Vishnu Swamins* and generally by all the *Bhagavatas*, and became a purely sectarian *Vaishnava*"

(*The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol IV p 56)

It is really a sad thing that no real research has been done on Nimbarka, whom of course even modern philosophers

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describe as one of the greatest saints of India. One of the most authentic treatises on spirituality is the "*The Cultural Heritage of India* in four volumes. In Volume IV it is observed that Nimbarka flourished after Ramanuja, "probably in the twelfth century AD" (p 55). In Vol III of the same book it observes, "He (Nimbarka) is supposed to have flourished after Ramanuja, in the eleventh century AD, though no definite evidence is available on this point" (p 333). Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes, "Nimbarka was a Telugu Brahmin of the *Vaishnava* faith who lived some time after Ramanuja and prior to Madhva, about the eleventh Century AD".

(*Indian Philosophy*, Vol II, p 751)

All agree on one point. Nimbarka was very much an active force in the spiritual life of India. All agree also on the point that Nimbarka flourished after Ramanuja and before Madhva.

His main work was *Vedanta Parijata Sourava*—The fragrant Essence of *Vedanta*. It was a commentary on *Brahma Sutras*. In this treatise the Saint advocates *Dwaitadwaita Veda*, that is dualistic monism. According to Nimbarka, "*Brahman* really transformed Himself into the world and the Souls, which are real and distinict and different from God (Brahman), but cannot exist without His support. The souls are atomic in size and many in number. *Brahman* is identified with *Krishna* who manifests Himself for the sake of His devotees and for controlling and guiding the world in the form of *Vyuhas* and incarnations (*avataras*). *Radha* is his power or *Shakti*. Individual souls are in bondage on account of their ignorance about God and their relation with Him. Ignorance vanishes only by grace of God obtained through devotion."

Nimbarka's *ashram* is still a holy pilgrimage visited by thousands of pilgrims who come to Brindavan.

Like a true *Vaishnava*, Nimbarka never attached any other schools of philosophy. This was really an exception.

Nearly all of those who wrote commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras* in the wake of Sankara attempted to refute his "doctrine of non-dualism." But Nimbarka did not. His main intention was God-realisation. "Inflnite is God and infinite are the ways to apprehend and comprehend Him."

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Nimbarka in his philosophy of *Bhedabheda*, that is dualism in non-dualism, observes that *Brahman* has two aspects—"the absolute and the relative." This means the aspects may be impersonal or personal. In the personal aspect "*Brahman* possesses attributes, and from Him as person has issued the universe of the name and form. But *Brahman* has not exhausted himself in the creation of the universe, for he is also transcendental and impersonal, without attributes and as such he is greater than the universe.

Vedanta Parijata Saurava is one of the five authentic commentaries on *Brahma Sutra*. The whole work is in a very condensed form composed in lucid popular style. It is observed by all scholars that the magnanimity of the saint is reflected by the way in which he has written the *Brahma Sutra* commentary. "Its peculiarity is that the author makes no attempt whatsoever to refute the theory of any other commentor on the Brahma Sutra, such as Sankara and others, or even for the matter of that to expound his own theories by means of appropriate argument". This might have been due to powerful *Vaishnava* humility. It has been observed by scholars that even his arguments in favour of his analysis of *Brahma Sutra* had not been made fully clear. All such great Saints are invariably shadowed by providence. Nimbarka had a brilliant disciple Srinivas who brought out a commentary named *Vedantakaustubha*. Keshava Kashmirin also wrote a treatise on the *Bhagavadgita* named *Tattva-Prakasika* very strongly supporting the philosophy of Nimbarka.

Nimbarka's *Dasa sloki* was an equally important, though minor work. It deals with *tritattvas* or the three realities—God, matter and soul; God, that is *Brahman* is described as *Krishna*; and Soul is *Chitta* and matter is *achit*.

Analysing the *Brahmasutra* by Nimbarka, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says, "His commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* develops the theory of the transformation (*parinama*) of *Brahman*: A distinction is made between the independent reality of *Purusottama* and the dependent realities of *jiva* and *prakriti*. While both *jiva* and *Ishwara* are self conscious, the former is limited while the latter is not. While the *jiva* is the enjoyer (*bhoktri*), the world is the enjoyed (*bhogya*) and *Ishwara* or God is the supreme controller (*niyantri*)."

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The Saint writes, "The *jiva* is of the form of Knowledge' (*jnanaswarupa*), though not in Sankara's sense. It is knowledge as well as the possessor of knowledge, even as the sun is light as well as the source of light. The relation of soul to its attribute is that of the *dharmin* (the qualified) to the *dharma* (the qualification). It is one of the difference as well as non-difference. Between the qualification and the qualified there is non-perception of the difference. Though *jiva* is atomic in size, on account of its possession of omnipresent quality of knowledge, it is able to experience the pleasures and pains throughout the body. The *jiva* is the agent of activity, *kartri*. The spiritual texts which deny activity are intended to bring out the dependent character of the activity of the *jiva*. The *jiva* has no independent (*svatantra*) knowledge or activity. *Ananda* or delight pertains to the *jiva* in all its states. The *jiva* continues to exist in dreamless sleep and the state of release. As *Ishwara* is the governor, the *jiva* in all its states has the nature of being governed (*niyamyatva*). The number of *jivas* is infinite, though they are all sustained by the supreme spirit." (Quoted by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan *Indian Philosophy*, Vol II, p 752).

Nimbarka describes *Brahman* as the highest reality—the greatest Being "one who is unsurpassedly great in nature and qualities-beyond any limit whatsoever." Nimbarka, unlike Sankara, accepts God as the personal one. God is not impersonal, he emphatically declares. This great personal God is *Hari* who incarnates as *Krishna*. Again, unlike Ramanuja or Madhva, Nimbarka does not accept *Brahman* as anything else except *Krishna*. He refuses to accept Him as *Narayana* or *Vishnu*. To Nimbarka, he is only *Gopalakrishna* unlike Ramanuja or Madhva, the Saint worships *Gopala-krishna* along with *Sri Radha*. In Indian philosophy and *Vaishnava* spiritual realm, the introduction of *Radha* cult is the original contribution of Nimbarka. Before him no other saint advocated the worshipping of *Radha*. Many later saints accepted this aspect of Nimbarka's new idea. Great saints like Mahaprabhu Chaitanya and in modern time Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa worshipped *Sri Krishna* in *Radha bhava*. Whether *Radha* was a consort of *Sri Krishna* is not so important. Perhaps she was

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not. And it is not necessary too. A wife can never be so devoted as a loyal devotee. *Sri Radha* is the symbol of hundred per cent surrender by a devotee to the Lord. She forgets her personal life. She is saturated with the love for *Krishna*. She finds the whole universe as *Krishnamoy jagat*. A wife cannot be like that. This love is divine. It is not conjugal love. This is a symbol of spiritual attraction by a devotee.

Later on Saint Jayadeva also composed his immortal *Geeta Govinda* in which *Radha* plays the most important role. As *Radha* feels the separation of *Krishna*, the Lord too feels her separation. This is something more than the *Radha-Krishna* episode of romance. The most significant message is the inseparable attachment of the disciple to the Lord. The Lord is bound to think about the devotee, who completely surrenders him to God. He has to look after him, protect him and shadow him. *Sri Radha* symbolises the whole community of disciples and devotees. She is not an ordinary woman.

As Hanuman is the symbol of devotion in Ramayana as the devoted *Hanuman* is prepared to die for Ramachandra, so is *Radha* devoted to *Krishna*. The relation between *Radha* and *Krishna* is more subtle, more delicate and more romantic. It is very much akin to the later *Sufi* philosophy where the relation between the devotee and the devoted is so sweet.

Radha symbolises *Shakti*. If *Sri Krishna* is the *Parama Purusha*, *Sri Radha* is *Parama Prakriti*.

No details of the biography of the Saint Nimbarka is available. It is not known also whether he made any pilgrimage at least to Varanasi. *Radha* symbolises the divine consort of the Lord. When Sankaracharya visited Varanasi, he had a vision. It is recorded that *Ma Annapurna*, the divine consort of the presiding deity of Varanasi, Vishwanath, appeared before the Saint as the widow with a dead body and asked the Saint to tell the corpse to make way for him. The annoyed saint asked her "How is it possible?"

Then the widow told him, "Why not? You have been talking so much about only of one indivisible *Brahman*. Where from does He derive His power? That is *Shakti*. That is *Parama Prakriti*. *Radha* symbolises that *Parama Prakriti*."

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Although Saint Nimbarka did not give any such detailed analysis of the cult of *Shakti* being symbolised by *Sri Radha* and realised knowledge revealed by *Radha*, he introduced a new concept which helped the devotees to find an easier way to God-realisation through complete surrender as by *Sri Radha*.

In a brief lucid lecture on Saint Nimbarka, Swami Prabhavananda, a direct disciple of Swami Brahmananda, compared Nimbarka's philosophy with that of Bhaskara, another saint who also wrote commentaries on *Brahma Sutra*.

In that brief analysis of Nimbarka's philosophy Swami Prabhavananda said, "The universe is, however, one with, as different from *Brahman*, even as the wave is one with but different from the ocean, or a ray of the sun is one with but different from the sun. Such also is the relationship between individual souls and *Brahman*; they are at once one with Him and different from Him. It is not merely a distinction between the part and the whole that we have in mind, for they are both part of *Brahman* and one with Him. Thus there exists almost an identity between the philosophy of Nimbarka and that of Bhaskara, but with the important difference that according to Bhaskara the individual soul is a part of *Brahman* only so long as it remains in ignorance-that in knowledge and emancipation it becomes one with Him, whereas Nimbarka declares that individual soul is a part of *Brahman*, and is also one with Him, both in the state of ignorance and in that of knowledge and emancipation"

(*The Spiritual Heritage of India, p 318*)

God (*Ishwara*) governs everything. Nimbarka emphatically maintains that He cannot be of "predicateless character". He has all the good qualities. And Nimbarka identifies this all powerful Almighty with *Sri Krishna* who is regarded as "possessing all auspicious qualities and exempt from the faults of egoism, ignorance, passion and attachment". The Almighty *Brahman*; that is *Krishna*, has four *Vyuhas*. He "manifests Himself in the *avataras* or incarnations." The Saint is convinced through enlightened knowledge that the Almighty *Ishwara* "is the material and the efficient cause of the universe. He is the material cause since creation means the manifestation

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of His powers (*Bhakti* of *chit* and *achit* in their subtle forms. He is the efficient cause of the universe, since He brings about the union of the individual souls with their respective *Karmas* and their results and the proper instruments for experiencing them."

Another important aspect of Nimbarka's theory is that the universe is not a mere illusion. It is "a manifestion of what is contained subtly in the nature of God". The Saint says, "if the world were not real it could not be superimposed on another.

"Every bit of work is being guided by God. The soul and the world are different from *Brahman*, since they possess natures and attributes different from those of *Brahman*. They are not different since they cannot exist by themselves and depend absolutely on *Brahman*. The difference signifies on distinct and dependent existence and non-difference signifies the impossibility of independent existence."

Dr. Radhakrishnan observes, "In the light of this doctrine of difference-non-difference, the famous text *Tat tvam asi is* interpretated. *Tat* signifies the eternal omnipresent *Brahman*, *tvam* refers to the individual soul whose existence depends on *Brahman* and *asi* brings out the relation between the two, which is one of difference compatible with non-difference. Such a relation subsists between the sun and its rays or the fire and its sparks. Though souls and matter are distinct from God, they are yet intimately connected with him, as waves with water or coils of a rope with the rope itself. They are both distinct and non-distinct from *Brahman*. We need not regard the distincts as mutually exclusive and absolutely cut off from each other. Difference and identity are both equally real and what is different is also indentical."

(*Indian Philosophy* Vol II, p 754)

The world, the soul cannot do anything on their own. They entirely depend on God. At the time of destruction He contains the subtle forms of *Jiva* and *jagat*.

Everything is being guided by God. Even a leaf cannot move without His wish. The saint says "the *Shakti* of *Brahman* is the material cause of the world and the changes of *Shakti* do not touch the integrity of *Brahman*.

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Dr. Radhakrishnan says, "what Ramanuja calls the body of the *Brahman* is the *Shakti* of Nimbarka. God does not stand in need of materials to construct the world. He is all-powerful and by His mere will he is able to create the world. *Brahman* is thus both the efficient and the material cause of the world. The world is identical with *Brahman* and depends on him for its becoming and its power to act, and yet in a sense, it is distinct from *Brahman*. The usual theory which traces the evolution of nature to the three *gunas* is accepted."

The Supreme spirit is conceived as free from all defects, a store-house of all beneficient attributes, possessed of a heavenly body full of beauty and tenderness sweetness and charm" (*Dasa sloki*).

"Souls are infinite in number and are atomic in size. Each soul is a ray of *Brahman* individualised". At the same time "The theory attempts to avoid the affirmation of an absolute identity where attributes are confused and distinctions abolished and at the same time tries to escape from mere dualism, which would impair the omnipresence of *Brahman* and limit His nature and sovereignity".

(*Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 755)

It is not only devotion that can lead to God-realisation. Nimbarka, like many later great Sufi Saints who too insisted on learning, insisted that one must get rid of ignorance. "In the state of ignorance the individual soul experiences the empircial world of phenomena, while in the state of liberation it attains the superconscious, transcendental vision of the noumenal, the absolute *Brahman*, at the same time that it realises itself as living both in union with *Brahman* and separate from Him".

So as Swami Prabhavananda so lucidly described in brief in his learned lecture in the USA, "Nimbarka lays stress upon both knowledge and devotion as means of attaining freedom. Knowledge reveals the true nature of *Brahman* and devotion culminates in all-absorbing love for him and in complete surrender of the finite will to the infinite will although in both the love and the surrender the individual self remains. For

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the followers of Nimbarka, *Krishna* and His divine consort *Radha* embody Supreme will and supreme love."

(*The Spiritual Heritage of India*, p. 318)

The Saint writes, "*Brahman* is eternal, independent, omnipresent, omnipotent and omnicient. He is the sole cause of the entire universe, but is without cause. He alone creates, maintains, and destroys the world of souls and matter. *Brahman* is thus both the material (*upadana*) and the efficient (*nimitta*) cause of the world. Explaining Nimbarka's stand a scholar explains, "Ordinarily the material and efficient causes are different from each other, e.g. the lump of clay is the material and the potter with his instruments the efficient—cause of a clay jar. But in the case of world-creation, the two are one and the same—that is one *Brahman*, the omnipresent Being". In the *Upanishads* it is observed, "The universal self wishing to be many, transforms Himself into the form of the world".

(*Chandogya Upanishad*, VI 2.3)

So when He wants to transform Himself into the world, He is the material cause, and in so far as He transforms Himself as such, He is the efficient cause of the world.

This idea is not very clear. So scholars have advanced mild challenge over the commentary. It has been observed, "Nimbarka himself does not clearly clarify in what precise sense *Brahman* is both the material cause and the efficient cause of the world, seeing that *Prakriti*, the primal matter, is ordinarily said to be the cause of all material objects". This has been clearly explained by Purusottama in his famous work *Vedanta Ratna Manjusa*. He points out that "*Brahman* is the material cause of the universe in the sense that creation means the manifestation of His subtle powers of sentience (*Cit*) and non-sentience (*acit*) in the form of gross effects. That is, during dissolution (*pralaya*), the entire universe of the sentient and the non-sentient returns to and remains in Him in a subtle state of His natural powers. Then at the beginning of creation *Brahman* manifests these powers (*cit Sakti* and *acit Sakti*) in the force of souls and *Prakriti* and from this *Prakriti*, the primal matter, there is the gradual evolution of the entire material world."

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About Salvation, Nimbarka has his original ideas, "*Moksa* or Salvation means realising our essential similarity with the Lord. When the soul in bondage attains a direct vision of the Lord, it attains His nature and most of his attributes and this is freedom and from the cycle of births and rebirths and the consequent, infinitely miserable mundane existence."

But this is not all. This is only one of the elements in salvation. The saint stresses the importance of self-improvement.

Nimbarka says divine vision is one step forward but that is only the beginning. That is described as *Brahma Swarupa Labha*. Equally or perhaps more important is the enlightenment of the inner soul. One must realise or attain one's real nature. This he calls *atma swarupa bhabha*. This is very much alike the *Upanishadic* philosophy—*atmanang biddhi*—Know Thyself.

The difference between *Brahman* and the soul, being natural and eternal, persists always—not only during the soul's state of bondage, but also during the state of release. Thus the freed soul too, like the soul in bondage, is both different and non-different from the Lord. Hence Salvation does not imply any identity of God and soul, any annihilation of the individuality or personality of the soul. On the contrary, it means the full development of its real nature or personality. This implies the full manifestation of its real nature or essence as consciousness or intelligence through and through as well as of its real attributes of freedom from sins."

Nimbarka insists that "attaining the nature of *Brahman* means becoming similar to and never identical with *Brahman*."

The highest teaching of the saint has been his guidance to God-realisation. Nimbarka says one may have God-realisation through five ways.

The first is *Karma*, that too *Niskam Karma*, work without any motive or attachment. One must work selflessly. Only *Niskam Karma* purifies a mind. Without a pure mind a person cannot attain divine knowledge.

So, the second way is knowledge or *jnan*. With a pure heart only one can attain pure knowledge which leads to God-realisation. Nimbarka makes it clear that "knowledge is not subsidiary to *Karma*, yet *Karma* prepares the mind for the

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ultimate rise of knowledge". The religious duties will have to be performed without any desire. This "disinterested Spirit" generates purification of mind that ultimately "expedites" divine knowledge. These activities include *yagnas* and other ritualistic activities. These are external works. Internally one must fully control one's mind, the senses. One must have eagerness for both knowledge and salvation. A person without knowledge cannot have God-realisation. The Saint insists "the seeker of salvation should also possess the essential qualities of deep learning, childlike simplicity, unostentatiousness, profound thoughtfulness and the gift of silence". Next to *Karma* and *jnana* comes *upasana*, that is deep meditation. Nimbarka tells us that this *upasana* can be of three varieties:

The first is *upasana* of *Brahman* as one's own self (*cit*); Secondly, meditation on the *Brahman* as inner controller of the non-sentient (*acit*) and thirdly, meditation on *Brahman* as different from both *cit* and *acit*. This is original idea of Nimbarka. Ramanuja said earlier that meditation and devotion were the same. Nimbarka says mere devotion is not meditation. It merely means an attachment or reverance for the Almighty.

Next to *karma*, *jnana* and *upasana* comes *prapatti*. Ramanuja earlier and Vallabha later also stressed its importance. *Prapatti* means complete surrender to God. Almost all Saints, irrespective of their sects and regions stressed its importance. Without complete surrender to God no spiritual progress is possible. This is a must for the devotee. The ego must go. One must identify completely with the Almighty as one's saviour. Only then the divine power will reveal Himself before the devotee. *Prapatti* or complete surrender cannot come unless one gets rid of ill feelings to others, good will to all, complete faith in God, a feeling of helplessness, looking to the Almighty as the only saviour and complete self-surrender to God. Without these six qualities *prapatti* is not possible.

This is a great message of the Saint. As a scholar has rightly pointed out, "Thus love of God means love of mankind no less; and self surrender to Him means ceaseless effort to follow the right path".

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It had a tremendous effect on the ethical and moral outlook to life.

Finally Nimbarka adds to the four ways that *karma*, *jnana*, *upasana* and *prapatti*, a fifth way—*Gurupasatti*. As surrender to God is important, equally important is the complete loyalty to the preceptor. One must surrender oneself to the *Guru* for spiritual guidance. The preceptor will be the path-finder. The entire responsibility is laid on the *Guru*. He will do everything that is necessary to lead the disciple to God-realisation. Nimbarka says, "the *Guru* will lead the devotee to God, and whatever is necessary for salvation is done for the devotee by the *Guru*, just as a mother of a sucking child who is ill, herself takes medicine for curing the child."

So the responsibility of the *Guru* in some cases, obviously, is more than the disciple himself.

All these five ways lead to God-realisation. Any one of them or all of them put together may help the devotee to reach his divine goal.

According to Nimbarka, the relation between the devotee and God Almighty is very cordial. There is no fear element. It is a relation of "sweet intimacy, love, spontaneous devotion and self surrender". To the Saint there is no other God than *Gopalakrishna* and *Sri Radha*. *Gopi's* are also in the team to have *Lila*. Nimbarka's greatest contribution, besides the five ways of God-realisation, has been the establishment of *Radha* cult. According to the *Cultural Heritage of India*, "Nimbarka is a prominent propounder of the *Radha-Krishna* cult, one of the most popular and influential cults that ever flourished in India, which even today claims millions of adherents all over the country".

(Vol. III, p. 344)

Nimbarka's philosophy is known as *Svabhavika-bhedabheda* doctrine. All earlier saints kept God on a higher pedastal. Ramanuja also talks of great devotion but that is only *aisvarya pradhan bhakti*. It is a "distant relation of awe and reverence." Nimbarka introduces a sweeter relation. His is *madhurya pradhana bhakti* or an intimate relation of love and friendship. It starts with reverence and a drill of suffering. But the end is most cordial—a great intimacy and personal friendship grows

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between the devotee and the Almighty. To quote a philosopher saint, "In this sense Nimbarka has given us the last word, the inner core, the real essence of religion."

About a thousand years ago it was not so easy as to a challenging reform in religious life to brush aside the ritualistic rites. It was a dynamic idea to tell devotees to concentrate on inner purity. It is in great appreciation of the qualities of head and heart the cultural history records proudly the liberal outlook and sound reasonings of the scholar Saint. It says: "From the ethical point of view the system of Nimbarka manifests a commendable spirit of broad mindedness and rationality. Nimbarka emphasizes not only the external performance of religious rites and rituals, but also, equally, the inner cultivation of the supreme qualities of self control, purity, simplicity and the like. He is of the opinion that one need not give up the world to attain salvation. Even a householder, in the midst of his thousand and one hundred duties can realise *Brahman* provided he performs them in a disinterested spirit." According to Nimbarka, "it is the spirit with which one does one's duties that counts. Anyone who performs his duties in an unselfish spirit attains salvation, whether he is a householder or an asectic."

This is very much like the preachings and teachings of the modern Saint, Sri Ramakrishna. He frequently described this "disinterested spirit" with the *Pankal* fish which lives in mud but not touched by it.

Nimbarka's was a most rational approach to God-realisation. Sankara's was more or less an intellectual exercise on *Advaitism*. Ramanuja's was *Vishistadvaitism*. Madhava's was pure dualism or *Dwaitism*. Nimbarka strikes a balanced intellectual exercise and emotionalism of the *dwatavadins*. In all fairness to Nimbarka the history records his subtle balancing of the two differing Schools of *Vedanta*.

After Nimbarka and Madhva, non-*Advaitic Vedanta* gradually reduces itself into an emotional form of religion. This kind of emotionalism cannot sustain a rational mind for long; for sheer enough is not sustainable for any length of time and soon tires the person. On the other hand, the over-dry intellectualism of philosophy, with no place for a personal religion may be awe-inspiring, but it depresses the devotee

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who desires to relax, in a simpler and softer feeling of personal relationship. It is here that Nimbarka does the greatest service to mankind by pointing to a path which satisfies both intellect and feeling, head and heart, without over-emphasising the one at the expense of the other."

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SAINT BASAWESWARA

(1105 A.D.—1167 A.D.)

Saint Basaweswara appeared in the spiritual scene of Karnataka in the early twelfth century, at a time, when Karnataka was a "spiritual waste land pathetically waiting for the life—giving rains of authentic faith". Basava's appearance brought a new turn in the chequered history of Karnataka.

Basava was a great *Shaiva*. His message of God-realisation through a harmonious synthesis of *Jnan*, *Karma* and *Bhakti* was a new source and vigour for the spiritual life in whole of India. He was an enlightened—*yogin*, devoted to *Shiva*, who introduced a new religious movement popularly known as *Lingayata Dharma*.

Basava was born in 1105 A.D. at Ingaleswara in Bagewadi in the Bijapur district. His father's name was Madarasa and Madalambike was his mother. Madarasa was the village headman. It was an official assignment and title was *gramanimani*. Both the parents were spiritually and financially rich and were much respected in the neighbourhood. The mother was deeply devoted to Lord *Shiva* and used to visit the local temple of *Nandishwara*, the presiding deity, as a regular routine after the day's work.

She used to meditate in the temple for long. Even at home she would spend much time in *japam* and worshipping the Lord in the midst of domestic work.

Madamba was sad because she lost her daughter Akka Nagamma a few years after her birth. She prayed to the Lord for a son. So when she was blessed with a son, she accepted him as a divine blessing and brought him up in an atmosphere of deep devotion. The child would worship *Shiva* right from his early days along with the mother. "Young Basava was a precocious child and was given to religious musings."

But the child was hardly eight when he was confronted with the first crisis of his life. Everything was arranged for his

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upanayanam ceremony. It is an auspicious occasion when the child is initiated through the sacred thread ceremony. "Basava sprang a surprise on the bewildered assembly of priests and elders by flatly refusing to undergo the ceremony on the ground that he had already been initiated by the grace of God into the only true faith of *Virashaivism*."

Basava concentrated more deeply on *Virashaivism*. He spent much time and attention to the study of ancient *Virashaiva* philosophy the beginning of which might be traced to *Shivagama* literature in the post *Vedic* period as also to the *Rudra* worship in the *Vedas*. The origin of *Shiva* worship has been traced to 3000 B.C. The prominent feature of *Shaivism* from its very inception was "worship and meditation of the creative cosmic Principle. The image of *Shiva* (*Shivalinga*), found in all the *Shaiva* temples throughout India is only a plastic representation of self-existent Truth." Some details on the subject may be available for study in depth in the book *Mystic Teaching of the Haridasas of Karnataka* by Heras.

On the history of *Virashaivism* there are two main trends of thoughts. The first school maintains that *Virashaivism* was founded very long ago by five great seers—Revanardhya, Marularadhya, Ekoramaradhya, Panditaradhya and Vishvaradhya. These sages rose out of five great *Sthavaralingas* of Ballehalli in Mysore State, of Ujjaini in Bellay District of Kedara in the Himalayas, of Sri Saila Mallikarjuna in Madras State and of Kasi or Varanasi.

Professor Sakhare however, after great research on the subject opines that the *acharyas* are not the originators of the *Virashaiva* faith since some of them are found to be contemporaries of Basava and others even later than he.

(Sakhare : *History and Philosophy of Lingayata Religion*, pp 416—18)

Dr Ramana Sastri says "such opinions as the great prophets founding the faith in each successive age should be taken only in a figurative sense and not in a literal sense."

(Sastri : *Siddhanta Dipika)*

A study in depth on *Virashainism* however reveals that it was founded by Basava only. It is observed "Labouring under

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the notion that high antiquity is a mark of soundness and adds to the greatness of its principles, some persons have enthusiastically attempted to push back the origin of Virashaivism, to very ancient times. Such a view clearly lacks historical perspective. With the advance of historical research, it is becoming clear that Basava is the founder of the *Virashaiva* faith, that it is a religion with a *linga* as its guiding and central theme, that the *Lingayata* religion has its own individuality and independent status and that it has a path, practice and philosophy all its own."

(*The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol IV p. 100*)

Dr. S.C. Mandimath has given some details on the subject in his *A Handbook of Virashaivism.*

Even Basava himself perhaps would not have claimed to the originator of the faith. It is not necessary to enter into a futile argument on the origin of *Virashaivism.* There are distinct proofs of its existence in pre-*Vedic* age. There are long chapters on *Rudra* in the *Vedas.* Basava must have revived the worship of *Rudra* and introduced a faith based on these lofty thoughts. Modern *Virashaivism* was founded by Basava and Basava alone. None can doubt that it was a powerful force.

It is recorded in the *Cultural Heritage of India* : "An influential and very powerful *Shaiva* sect, known as the *Virashaivas* or *Lingayatas*, rose in the Karnataka and Maharashtra countries. The early history of the Sect is obscure, but it was most probably founded, or at least brought into prominence, by Basava, the *Brahmana* Prime Minister of Bijjala who had usurped the Chalukya throne about A.D. 1160. This new Sect flourished at the cost of Jainism and Buddhisms and was the main cause of their decay in the Deccan and Kannada district which constitute now its main stronghold." (p 51)

The mother was ready for the sudden stand taken by the son. She knew that her son was not an ordinary one. When she used to worship *Shiva* at the *Nandishwara* temple one day she had a vision of the Lord. She was sheding tears. Suddenly she heard a voice "Do not weep my child. You will be blessed with a son who will come with all the power of *Shiva.* He will

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show a new path of worshipping the Lord. He will be a path finder for thousands of worhsippers of *Shiva*.

Except the husband nobody knew about the incident. That was exactly why she named the child as *Basava—Shiva's* carrier *Brishava* which in Kannadese is *Basava*. The mother was not surprised at the stand taken by the child during the *upanayanam* ceremony.

Besides the vision there was another auspicious incident. Number of pilgrims and enlightened monks visited the *Nandishwara* temple. Once one such enlightened *Shaiva* Saint Jatabeda Muni came to the temple. He suddenly came to the house of Madarsa. Both Madarasa and Madalamba duly worshipped the saint and begged of him to bless their child.

The couple were surprised with pleasure when they came to know that the saint had come to the village only with that purpose. All the neighbours thronged there. They were mainly attracted by the spiritual leader. He recited some prayers and told the happy couple that the child was not an ordinary one and that he was going to be a spiritual leader in near future. He also told them before the crowd that he had learnt all these things in an intuition before seeing the child. That had led him to the village.

Right from childhood Basava used to be fascinated by Lord *Ingaleswara*, an incarnation of Shiva. He would like to wander round the *Shaiva* medicants who would congregate at the temple. People from all castes visited the temple trekking long distances.

The child was a brilliant student. Within a short period he picked up grammar, literature, *puranas*. But all his attention was on meditation. He would spend all his leisure time in deep meditation away from the crowd. He was preparing himself for the task ahead.

Opportunities came to the saint on their own. After passing some years at *Ingaleswara*, his mind pined for the holy place *Kudala Sangam*. The chance came spontaneously.

Kudala Sangam was known for scholars and association with *Shaiva* mystics. The saint must visit the spot and spend some years in meditation of Lord *Shiva*.

Basava's elder sister Nagalambe was of marriageable age. After the death of their parents both were being looked after

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by the pious maternal grandmother and maternal uncle Baldev who was in civil service at Kalyan, then known as Mangalwada. The family had to live at *Ingaleswar*. A bridegroom, Shivadas, was selected for Nagalambe. Shivadas, a handsome young scholar, hailed from a well-to-do family. After the sister's marriage Basava decided to stay at *Kudala Sangam* and study the scriptures. That was the best place for Basava to meditate on Shiva.

The elder sister was very happy. She also wholeheartedly supported the brother in his new plan. Basava started his studies with new vigour. He studied *Vedas*, *Upanishadas*, *Agama* and *Karya Puranas* for which the holy place was famous. The scholars from *Kudala Sangam* were well known throughout Karnataka. It was a centre of enlightened mendicants.

Ishairiya Guru was the most learned preceptor of the most important centre here. He took charge of Basava's learning. Very soon Basava became well known as a brilliant scholar.

Great enlightened sages like Desimai, Rebansiddha, Madaran, Keshiraj were all living at this seat of learning. Basava met all of them one by one. It did not take him much time to complete the sixty three *Purans* and all about Tamil Nainars.

The result was immediate. The young brilliant devoted heart of Basava was deeply engrossed in the sacred thoughts of the Holy *Shiva*. The solitude, the flora and fauna of the centre, the serene atmosphere of the blissful corner near the temple of *Sangameswara* simply fascinated the young devotee.

Here the daily routine of Basava kept him busy in plucking flowers at dawn, dressing the living deity of *Sangameswara* with flowers, meditation in the quiet temple and recitation of the hymns in His honour. Days passed. So were months and years. It was here that the old enlightened sage Jatabedamuni met him on his own and reminded him of his earthly duties. It was in this temple that Jatabedamuni transmitted his spiritual power to Basava and guided him to the path of God-realisation.

Basava had many queries, many problems, many questions to ask about his dearest Lord. One by one he got all the replies from Jatabedamuni at this holy place.

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The main burning problem in the mind of the saint was the caste system. For a long time—since the days he rejected the ceremony of sacred thread in childhood—the problem had been constantly agitating his tender mind. "How is it that so many classes are unnecessarily being created by men just to stand in the way of God-realisation to millions of people? Why should the door of temple be closed to somebody who has been born to a so-called low caste merely by accident? *Shiva* is the universal creator. *Shavism* is a religion showering blessings and compassion to all. It is all-embracing universal. Why should it be limited only to a few *Acharyas* and monks? *Vedic* or non-*Vedic*, *Aryans*, *Davidians*, *Brahmins*, *Shudras* *Pandits* and *chandals*, the learned and the unlettered, the rich and the poor, all should have equal access to Him? The great Father cannot neglect anybody. He cannot turn away anybody. How is it that the existing social order practices it the otherway?"

The *Guru* listened to him calmly and quietly. "This needs a new revolutionary movement. This needs a big shake up," said Basava.

"Yes my son, that is true. It needs a man with great self sacrifice with tremendous spiritual power. That needs a great leader".

"*Prabhu*, if you so desire, I shall leave everything and embrace *sannyas* of the *Shaiva* order and take up the challenge".

"No, you need not embrace *sannyas*. It does need lot of preparation no doubt. You can take up the task even as a *grihi*. You will do it better through social and national revitalisation".

Then the *Guru* explained to the disciple the concept of *Karyakavay Kailash*. Work is worship, *Kayak* or *Karma* is the *Kailash* of human life. "You have to complete *Kayak Sadhana*. This earth of the universal Father will be your field of activity. The main philosophy of *Kayak* is that both the body and mind must be fully utilised in our daily life and this should be taken as a divine duty. The work of body and mind, the spiritual work and all meditation and prayers must form a harmonious orchestra bringing a divine melody unto this earth. In our daily life we must devote all our surplus money to the service of the devotees of *Shiva* and the *Shivayogi Jangams*. Mind you

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unless one has full attachment to *Shiva* one cannot get unattached from *Karma*".

Basava accepted each word of the *Guru* as the new guiding principle of his spiritual life. He took a vow to translate the ideas of Jatabedamuni into reality in practical life.

The *Guru* gave Basava his whole-hearted blessings. He also blessed him with a prophesy. "Yes my son, you will succeed in your mission. Prepare yourself thoroughly for the gigantic task. Simultaneously you follow the life of a householder. Very soon the Almighty will give you proper authority to translate your ideas to practical shape. You will get administrative power to carrey out your plans in due course. That is equally needed. Never forget for a moment the main motto—*Kayakavay Kailash*".

"It is indeed very difficult to attain solution through *Karma Sadhana*, as you know so well. I accept your instructions as orders. They must be carried out in full. You will only have to tell me whether I shall be able to reach the Holy feet of *Shiva* through this path?"

"Do not worry. Not only my blessings, the kind spiritual support of the *Allam Prabhudeva* is also showered unto you. Your path will be strewn with flowers of success. Prabhudeva Allam is a great enlightened saint. He is known and respected as the greatest *Shaivayogin* in whole of South India. You will meet him at proper time".

Showering all his blessings to the great disciple, the Guru Jatabedamuni left the holy temple.

In course of time Basava became well known to the *elite* and mendicants of *Kudala Sangam Muth*. He attended a number of discussions and participated in a number of religious ceremonies centring round *Shaivism*. He immediately caught the imagination of one and all for his liberal views, his all—embracing *Shaivism* and above all vast learning.

With great difficulty he got a job as an examiner of accounts in the Government Treasury. He fumbled in accounts-keeping in the beginning. But that was the *Guru's* instruction. Once he took up the assignment he gave his heart and soul to it. He discovered major mistakes and got recognition for his service.

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The Controller of Accounts, Siddha Dandadhipa, got his detailed background and discovered that he was the son of his intimate friend Madarasa, his father. He invited him to stay in his house.

He got elevated to higher posts in quick succession due to hard work and intelligence.

He was devoting his physical energy and attention to his civil service where he succeeded his father's friend, Siddha Dandadhipa, after his retirement. But his mind always pined for the Holy Temple at *Kudala Sangam*. He went to the temple on a holiday. Chances always come like that. Not only did he meet his *Guru*, Basava was thrilled to learn from Jatabedamuni that Allam Prabhudeva was also present in the temple. His joy knew no bounds. He had gone there just by chance.

He was led to Allam Prabhu. The kind saint showed his blessings on him.

The Saint told him in soft sweet voice: "You are definitely making good progress in *Kayak Sadhana*. But unless you have a divine blessing the foundation will not be sound. To turn the earth into Kailash, you have to have visions of *Kailashpati—Shiva*. You must have His vision. Only then will you succeed in your sacred mission".

So the young devotee went to the *Sangamesheswar* temple and sat there in deep maditation. He was sitting there for quite some time in a condition of trance. Suddenly he found a flood of light in the whole room. *Sangameshwer* appeared before him. He heard a voice talking to him, "My son Basava, devote yourself to the service of *Shiva* and revive *Shaivism*. The task that you have undertaken with this end in view will definitely meet with success. Thousands of devotees are looking forward to listening to your guidance and blessings". Then the figure vanished. It got mingled with the *Lingabigraha* of the Holy Temple.

Basava ran to his *Guru*, the great saint Prabhudev Allam. He told him everything.

He knew everything. He must have done it himself.

He asked the excited Basava to calm down "It is alright. Get calm. Be quiet. Settle down. You are lucky today, you had a vision! Now go and spread the message of the great Creator of the universe. All are equal. Serve all and be kind to

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all. Whenever you need my guidance you will have me by your side".

With new zeal, Basava started his spiritual pursuit. He must translate the ideas of the enlightened saints—Allam Prabhudeva and Jatabedamuni into practice.

Soon thousands came to know about the vision of Basava. People started coming to him for spiritual guidance. They affectionately called him Basaweswara.

He was not happy with his job.

Bijjal had usurped the kingdom of the Chalukyas by wrongful method. And he had to save him.

He remembered Allam Prabhudeva.

He met him. He explained to him everything. With a smile Allam Prabhudeva told him," Have you forgotten *Kayakavay Kailash*? This great sentence should be the motto of your life. You are in Government service, so what?"

He should carry out his works in the name of God. Service is worship. This is for the good for man. Bijjal was a better administrator. The subjects were to get better deal under him. He rose from a Governor to a king by capturing the throne.

Allam Prabhudeva told him, "What is good is not to be judged by you. That will be judged by *Shiva* Himself."

Basava's mind got quietened. The stir was over.

"Alright *Prabhu*, I shall only carry out my duties to the entire satisfaction of all. My mind will be only at the feet of *Shiva*. I shall have to spread the message of *Virashaivism*. In that great mission I want your name to be associated. That will give me immeasurable strength," said Basaweswara.

"Yes you can. If you think that will help you in your movement you can certainly affix my name. I always stand by you in your new task of spreading the message of *Virashaivism*".

With all his heart and soul Allam Prabhudeva blessed Basava and left the disciple thousand times stronger than before.

Basava took the guidance of the spiritual path finder strictly word for word. He got married. He married Gangambika, daughter of Baladeva, Prime Minister to King Bijjala. This was also pre-destined. By this marital contact Basava

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became very powerful in the whole kingdom. This helped him in his task of propagating his faith of *Virashaivism* in the whole of the kingdom without any protest from any quarter. This was also a stepping stone for him to ascent to further power which was so necessary to spread the divine message and reflect the ideas of *Kayakavay Kailash* to reality. All the preliminaries of *Sadhana* were over. Both the great enlightened *Gurus* had blessed him wholeheartedly. Both advised him to get into power and do God's work.

He was sure of success.

He took up his job seriously and earned a very good name as an able administrator. Besides being so near to the Prime Minister, who was his father-in-law. Basava was also known for his honesty, integrity and compassion for all. Not only among the devotees of *Shiva*, he was also popular in the whole kingdom. He gained royal favour for his able guidance in day to day work. He looked to his personal servants and guards as *Shiva*, because they were followers of the Lord. There are many anecdotes about his kindness. Once some thieves stole three milching cows from the shed. Next morning he went to see the calves who were looking towards him with tearful eyes. The Saint's heart immediately got deeply touched. He ordered the servants to catch hold of the thieves and promised that he would not touch any food till they had brought the thieves.

The police parties went round the town. After a thorough search the thieves were produced before him. He told them "You fellows are very cruel. If you were interested in milk and curd why did you leave the calves so miserably helpless ? Take also the calves and go away."

The thieves fell at his feet and promised to lead a better life.

Along with Basava also joined Siddharam, of Sholapur and Madival Machthaiya. The great Saint Allam Prabhu also kept his promise. Occasionally he would visit him to instil inspira tion to and the devotees.

Although Buddha allowed women to join the order, he did not like to encourage it in the beginning himself. Basaweswar accepted women in his order unreservedly. He took special care for their trainlng and spiritual progress. Akka Mahadevi

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was the most important among the women disciples of the Saint.

Basava used to find more than a thousand devotees of *Shiva* everyday. There were enemies of the Prime Minister also. They made complaints against Basava to the king a number of times. They wanted to entangle the saint in corruption charges. When the king heard it so many times he too had some doubts. So he asked him directly how he managed to feed a thousand mouths everyday. The honest Prime Minister immediately said, "Maharaj, I believe in the *Kayak* philosophy of the *Virshaivas*. I keep only a portion of my income that I earn through, hard work for my family. The rest is spent on feeding the devotees. There is no difference between the *Shaivas* and their deity *Shiva*. We serve also the *Jangamas*, *Shaiva* mendicants, devoted to the cause.

Several years passed and the Yogi spent time only in deep *Sadhana*. Basava saw a divine light "a splended vision in a dream of Lord *Shiva* blessing him and directing him to go to Kalyan and begin his mission. Meanwhile his father-in-law died. After Baladeva's demise, king Bijjala offered the post of Prime Minister to Basava. He readily accepted the offer with Bijjala's assurance of non-interference in Basava's day-to-day administration. The whole thing seemed to be a miracle. A new ground was ready for the saint administrator to preach his new philosophy.

Basava's official position coupled with his chairty, piety and learning made his new creed very popular. Kalyan became thence forward the main centre of his spiritual and social activities. It was from Kalyan that the new message of devotion to *Shiva* and social equality spread far and wide, attracting many a high soul *sharna* from all parts of India to that holy place. The order of priests known as *jangamas* was reorgainsed, and the number of his followers, drawn from almost every caste, began to swell day by day. Kalyan became the seat of world fellowship attracting people from different strata of society like Akka Mahadevi, who would have been a queen; Machayya who was a washerman by caste; Marayya who came from among winnowers of rice; Chandayya the rope-maker; and several other who joined him to seek God and sing His pariase."

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Saint Basaweswara was among the first in Karnatak a to oppose the age old caste system. Not only did he welcome the numeorus persons from the untouchable lot as his disciples but he him-self visited, their houses and joined them in their community lunch.

Once Basava was loitering around. Near that locality, at the end of the town, lived an untouchable whose name was Kambaliya Nagider. Nagider was a disciple of the saint. He was quite well known as a devout *Virshaiva*. Even old, learned devotees paid attention to his news. They respected him. Basava was fond of him. When he found himself near Nagider's house, Basavaa invariably rushed to the devotee's house. The news spread like wild fire. All the devotees in the neighbourhood immediately came to Nagiders house. It became a mini *mahasammelan*. They were discussing some subtle points of *Shiva-upasana*. Basaweswara's presence gave them great inspiration.

The devotees would not miss the rare chance of enjoying a community lunch along with their celebrated *Guru*. Basava readily agreed. The whole crowd enjoyed a grand feast. It was a rare privilege particularly for the untouchtble families to get such a highly respected *Brahmin* Saint at their door. They simply could not think of it.

The cities were only waiting for such a chance. Basava looked to all devotees as *Jangamas* or *Shiva*, incarnation of the creator. To him each devotee was a citadel of God. So Nagider, a great devotee of *Shiva*, was an incarnation of *Shiva*, Himself. The question of his being an untouchable did not come in the way of his welcoming the Saint. They all happily enjoyed *Padodaka* and *Prasada*.

The orthodox *Brahmins*, who never liked *Basava* for his-llieral views and relaxed demeanour with the weakers members of the community, had the eyes of hawk on the saint. They all collected themselves and reached Narayana Bhatta, the king's religious preceptor.

Narayana also did not like Basava. He was too popular and had eclipsed Narayana Bhatta who, inspite of being the royal *Guru*, had hardly any impact on the public. He was terribly jealous of him and also waiting for an opportunity to let down the Saint. When the deputationists met Narayana

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Bhatta with the whole story the orthodox *Brahmin* was too glad to lead them to the king. They all left for the place in a team. Quite a number of ministerial staff also joined them. They knew the popularity of Basava and had no chance of getting the post of the prime Minister in the ordinary way. They now thought of getting power by organising a conspiracy against him. Bijjal heard everything. The king was never confident of his power. He knew very well how popular Basava was both as a Prime Minister and also as a leader of *Virshaiva* movement. He was respected by his followers as an incarnation of God. He was too shrewd to touch him so easily. In his heart of hearts he was also jealous of his tremendous populairty. He too wanted to get rid of him, but he knew pretty well that it was not an easy task.

The king made it clear that he knew all the movements of the Prime Minister. Within rules he could not touch his hair. But he assured them of punishing him in one way or another in due course. The deputationists were delighted. They left the palace duly satisfied. The king wanted to hatch a plan to reduce him step by step.

Basava by then, was one of the most popular figures in whole of South India. Any action against him meant a rebellion. He too knew all these plots but was never afraid of any body. He had full confidence, in himself and faith in *Shiva*.

The shrewd followers of Narayan Bhatta tried to convince the king that with all his popularity and power one day Basava might overthrow him and capture the throne. The king too was thinking in that line.

The king sent for the Prime Minister. The king deliberaately did not allow him to sit near him. He treated him as if he was an untouchable.

With great abhorrence and disdain the king asked his Prime Minister, "How it is that I hear so many complaints against you from so many quarters? You may like to do whatever you like in your own house. You are a Prime Minister. It it in keeping with a Prime Minister like you to sit in a line along with untouchables and the backward people whom we keep away from all our social and religious functions and ceremonies ? These people will sit on our head and

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I shall hold you responsible for any lapse in administration or any rebellion. You know pretty well that I consider the untouchable not fit for social contacts. You are endearing them and as such creating a division among the king and his subjects. Shall I take it that you are doing it deliberately with some ulterior motive?

The learned Prime Minister at once recalled the whole background. He could at once realise that this was not the voice of the king but Narayan Bhatta and his followers. He behaved calmly and said, "Your Majesty, you know so well that I am a worshipper of *Virshaiva* religion. I make no secret of it. The question of creating a dissension between the king and the subjects is definitely far from my mind. I am their servant. I serve all of them as manifestations of *Shiva*. They are all children of *Shiva*. I can't think of any discrimination among the children of God. People from all castes, creed and sects must form a big family and only then we can make this earth a paradise. Only then we can turn it into *Kailas Dham*. That is the inner message of *Virshaivism*. You are mistaken, Your Maiesty. There is nothing sinful here. The question of any fear to your authority does not and cannot arise at all."

"These are all sentimental ideas. They are all dreams of an idealist never to materialise. They cannot simply mislead me. You attempt to break the traditional practice. You are all meant to hatch a rebellion against the ruler. I can see the seed. You want to brush aside the directions of *Vedic* scriptures. With the support of these untouchables you are only consolidating your power. That is your dream."

The saintly Prime Minister was not prepared for such rude handling. He was behaving in his best. So at first he could not believe his ears.

He asked the king, "What are you saying your Majesty? Can it ever be true"?

"Yes, I mean what I say. Every word of it is true and significant. And mind you, I like to warn you not to indulge in this free mixing with untouchables. The repurcussion, I must tell you, will not be good. You must not go ahead with your free thinking and liberal views. There is still an authority, that is the king and by no means does he support these meaningless acts of an idealist."

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The King's anger was reflected in his words. In his mind he was simply fuming in fury. He checked him to some extent. This was the beginning of a dissention between the king and the Prime Minister. Immediately after this incident the matter went worse when some inter caste marriages took place between some untouchables with some *Brahmins*. The son of one untouchable *Shiva* follower, Haralaya, got married to the daughter of a *Brahmin* Madhubaya. Both belonged to *Virashaiva* faith.

The orthodox school made strong protest. They objected to the ceremony saying that the whole thing was sacrireligious. These *Brahmins* were quite influential. They approached the king. Bijjal wanted to punish both the parties severely. He was only waiting for a chance.

Both Haralaya and Madhubaya were summoned to the royal court.

The convicts were told that the marriage was an act against religious injunctions.

Both of them pleaded not-guilty. It was a matter of faith they explained that both belonged to the same fraternity and found no discrimination among children of God. They were all equal.

The king threatened them to give exemplary punishment if they did not postpone and finally got it cancelled.

Both of them disagreed. They made it clear that except *Shiva* in heaven and Basaweswara on earth they did not care for any body else.

The king got terribly annoyed. It was the limit, he thought. He thought it was open rebellion. So he immediately ordered the court to get the eyes of the two *Shiva* devotees extracted on the spot.

He wanted to set an example.

The order was carried out immediately.

When the saint heard about the whole incident he was in tears. He could realise that king's doomsday was near. He resigned from his Prime Ministership and became a *jangama*.

The king, of course, was killed soon by some *Virashaiva* devotee.

When the Saint heard about the king's final end at his follower's hands, he was not happy. He did not support the

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act of the extremist *Virashaiva* devotee. He never wanted any one to take the law into one's own hands. "Jagadev should not have murdered Bijjal," he said.

He was a man full of sins.

"Jagadev has committed a mistake. He should have waited for the judgement of the Lord. I have nothing to say. Nothing to do. I am a mere spectator."

Had he willed he could have sat on the throne easily. But he got a higher assignment. He had become an enlightened *Jangama*, an enlightened ascetic.

By then *Guru* Jatabedamuni was no more. *Kudala Sangam* was full of *Shiva* devotees. The saint preferred staying there in solitude. He did not like to meet the innumerable disciples and devotee, too. He spent all his time in the meditation of the creator of the universe. Except *Shiva* he could not think of anything else.

During the period he composed innumerable *Bachans* or (Great) sayings. One of them says,

"O Lord, all my talks will henceforth be filled with nectar of Thy Name.
My eyes will be graced at
Thy endless beauty
My mind will be full only with
Thy thoughts.
My ears will be graced to listen to
Thy praise-songs
O Kudala Sangama Deva
Only by touching Thine lotus feet
Shall I make my life ever blissfull :

That the king behaved with the saint with a feeling of vengeance is noted by all. According to a biography the king "naturally enough viewed with suspicion and increasing alarm the rapid growth of the new creed. But Basava's hypnotic hold on the people and his undoubted prowess and integrity compelled Bijjala to put up with Basava and his actions. Bijjala took advantage of the marriage of a *Brahmin* covert to an untouchable convert to stir up trouble against Basava and to take measures against the *Virashaiva* movement and its

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chief exponent. Accordingly, the two devotees who had married were ordered to be dragged over the ground at the end of a rope. This action of Bijjala, instead of striking terror into the hearts of the *Virashaivas*, only infuriated them; they lost their normal balance, and now only visibly thirsted for revenge. Basava was sorely grieved at the unsavoury turn events were taking and tried to stem the tides of violence on both side. Overwhelmed by a sense of failure, Basava sought refuge in his titulary diety, Lord *Kudala Sangama*, and became one with Him."

That was in 1167 A.D.

The saint lived only for 62 years. That was an important period for whole of Karnataka. Today Basaweswara is regarded as the *avatar* of Lord Nandishwara by well over 45 lakh devotees in Karnataka, was both the spiritual and political saviour of Karnataka. He practised in his life what he preached in his sayings. He swept across the whole country and declared that in the eyes of God, all creation was one. He told the people that God was at their elbow, provided they knew how to call Him. He gave a new form and function to Kannada prose. Prose in Kannada literature had till then assigned a menial status to *champu*. He lifted it to lyrical heights and gave it suppleness and flexibility. The *Vachana* that Basaweswara fashioned are alive today. What he touched he adorned. For beauty, for complete expression of the author's personality for pure and powerful injunctions towards the higher life, for lyrical quality and for poetic grace, Basaweswara's *Vachanas* are unsurpassed. The main instrument of forging and propagating his gospel was the *Anubhava Mantapa*, something analogous to an academy of religion or a modern assemblage of Cardinals. It was adorned by the presence of Allam Prabhu, Siddarameswar, Channabasava, Akka Mahadevi and others.

Thanks to the untiring efforts of Basava *Virashaivism* became a popular faith in Karnataka. The most significant aspect of *Virashaivism*, however, is something more revolutionary. "It started as a protest against *Brahmanism* and caste". It has not been able to maintain its reformist features. The *lingayatas* are distinctly known for carrying a *linga* "worn in some manner round the neck."

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Basava replaced *upanayana* by *diksha*. He did not believe in any caste system. This was replaced by *Linga dharana* ceremony, wearing the *linga*. "It is a simple ritual with which are combined ethical preachings and the occultism of *yoga*. The gist of initiation is that the *Guru* transmits his spiritual power to his disciple, which pierces through the evil of nesciences and liberates the soul from the three bonds." The liberated is called *anga*, "the Godword soul, the soul that aspires to ascend towards God." This is not an easy drill. "This ascent can only be achieved by undergoing a course of strict spiritual disciplne and by living a life of devotion to the Godhead or *linga*. Such a life of devotion and spiritual discipline forms the practice of this religion as it does of other religions."

Lingachar, *Sadachar*, *Sivachar*, *Vrityachar* and *Ganachar* are the five codes of conduct popularly known as *Panchachar*.

Lingachar finds the follower to worship the *linga* as a regular routine without failure. He must daily worship the *linga*.

Linga must be respected as "the representation of the Divine". The devotee must be strictly monotheistic.

Secondly, comes *Sadachar*. A follower must follow a profession and strictly lead a moral and virtuous life. He must earn money by honest work and utilise his savings and surplus for others in need. He should feed and clothe the *jangamas*, the intinerant preachers of the *Lingayata* religion.

Thirdly, comes *Shivachar*. Members must make no difference between one *Lingayata* and another as they are all devotees of Shiva. This demands that "a *Lingayata* should dine and marry freely with other members of the same community, even if they follow different vocations."

Fourthly, *Vrityachar* demands complete humility and surrender to *Shiva* and His devotees. "It enjoins upon the devotee to behave humbly and modestly towards men and women and kindly to all animals."

Finally, *Ganachar* represents "the spirit of vindication." The devotee must not tolerate "adverse remarks against the Godhead and ill treatment of men and animals, by others. As a member of the community, he has to strive for its upliftment and development".

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Basava was a dynamic social reformer. The *Vaidikas* who had clung to the crust, sacrificing the substance, came in for scattering scorn for him. The Saint assailed the people who bowed a thousand times to the *Naga* sculptured in a stone, though they would put a real serpent to death. He abhored the castes system from the core of his heart. He welcomed people from all castes and made no discrimination. Even women were allowed to get initiation. The new society was popularly known as *Lingadiksha*.

Basava was a believer in non-violence and he emphasised the dignity of labour. "He equated manual labour (*kayaka*) with the abode of Divinity."

His preaching to mankind was to rise above the *Karmachakra*. "*Karma*, good or bad, was selfperpetuating. The person who followed the path of *Karma* would be lost in the bog of attachment. *Jnana* was therefore the only way to release."

There are eight *avaranas* which distinguish *Virashaivism* from other schools of thought. They are *Guru*, *Linga*, *Jangama* (*avatar*), *Padodaka* (water sacrificied by the touch of the feet of the *Guru* or *Jangama*), *Prasada* (food so sanctified), *Bhasma* (sacred ashes), *Rudraksha* (rosary) and *Mantra* (mystic words).

Guru, as in all other sects, occupies the highest place in the domain of religion. He is the "spiritual and religious guide". He has to initiate the devotee in a regular ceremonial manner. "It is the *Guru* who by initiation ushers the devotee into the second or spiritual birth as it were. It is he who gives the devotee real insight into the principles of the *Lingayata* religion, explains inner meaning of the practices and guides him on the path of righteousness. Since the *Guru* has gained the first hand knowledge of God and the world by experience, the devotee finds great delight in serving and initiating him, and in acquiring knowledge from him. Hence the *Guru* has been given the first place among the *Astavaranas*.

Next to the guide comes *Linga*, the deity. In fact, according to the devotees of the order and *Astavarana* mandate, "the *Linga* is the centre and basis of all religious practices and observances, because it is the Divinity concretely represented. The custom is that it is given by the *Guru* to the body at the very birth. It should always be borne on the body by a person

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from the time of his birth to that of his death. A devotee of the *Virashaiva* faith is committed to offer prayer to the Deity every day. He must not miss his daily worship of the *Linga*, as it makes the wearer and worshipper conscious of his duty to the Godhead." The prayer is also treated as a promise to do all earthly duties properly. The devotee's target is to do everything perfectly and turn the world into a heavenly paradise. Besides spiritual attainment this practice has a tremendous effect on the moral and ethical values of life in general. It definitely leads society in general to a higher state of consciousness and leads to better understanding and harmonious living.

Equally important is the third force, that is *Jangama* or the order of ascetics. According to the *Virashaiva* philosophy, "The *Jangama* is the third *abarana*". It is peculiar to this religion. Its significance and roles are tremendous. *Jangama* means literally "dynamic knowledge having the same root *gama* as in *Agama*, *Nigama* in the sense of knowledge. When it is applied to a person, it means one who has dynamic knowledge of God".

The ascetic is a dedicated life and it is the duty of all members of the order to look after his material wellbeing. He moves from place to place carrying the message of the Lord. He has to preach on moral values and the role of spirituality in everyday life. He is a man emancipated even while living, moving about in the country for the sake of guiding the devotees in the religious and spiritual excercises.

Jangama occupies a unique place in the *Virashaiva* order. "A *Virashaiva* is enjoined not to make any distinction between the *Guru*, *Linga* and *Jangama*, as all of them are believed to be equal and command the same reverence."

The fourth *abarana* is *Padodaka*. It means literally "the water from the feet of the *Guru* or *Jangama*". It is naturally considered to be very sacred. This is necessary to instil spiritual inclination or a spirit of devotion and dedication to the devotee.

The fifth *abarana* is *Prasada* almost with a similar significance. Both *Padodaka* and *Prasada* have a common social significance. *Prasada* literally means consecrated food. So *Padodaka* and *Prasada* are water and food made holy and "spiri-

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tually magnetized by the touch, sight, or wish (*sankalpa*) of the *Guru* or *Jangama*". Besides religious value, it has a social significance. All the devotees are treated equally. "In the presence of the *Guru* or *Jangama*, all devotees irrespective of caste, colour, creed, age and sex are considered equal and all partake of the same food and water, thus suggesting a fraternal bond which is a very vital factor in communal solidarity". The next *abarana* is *bhasma*. "The inner intuition which reveals the self and burns up the illusion is called *bhasma*. As an outer symbol of this, the *Lingayata* religion enjoins *bhasma dharana*. This is a feature which distinguishes them from other sects. This is practised by besmearing the body with the holy ashes".

The next is *Rudraksha*, an important *abarana*. The devotee has to change angle of vision and try to percieve the divine in all events and movements. This is the eternal *Rudraksha mala*, a rosary of *Rudraksha* beads.

The final *abarana* is the *Mantra*. This signifies the holy name of God that is to be uttered while meditating in solitude. The vocal expression is sometimes practised in groups or in mass prayers with the eternal *mantra Om Namah Shivaya*—Obeisance to *Shiva*.

These are the eight *abaranas* which are regularly practised by the *Virashaiva* devotees. They are the eight strong elements that guide and help them in God-realisation.

The Saint had given us some of the sweetest songs in praise of *Shiva*. They are popularly known as *Bachanas*. They have been compiled in many book forms, the most important of them being *Selected Sayings of Basava* by Baji.

You are mad with the joy of Spouts
You sing in tune, in *tala* and *laya*.
Reading of so many books may give you deep learning.
The whole thing goes in vain
If you cannot utter once with full throat.
Dasohang
(I am the servant)
and
Take shelter at His Lotus feet with all your hearts.
The peahen dances in so many ways

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The violin produces so many melodies.
The parrot utters so many tutored words.
But does any one of them touch the heart?
Enkindle the light of love in your heart till you
Call the Lord with all your heart and soul
And only then will be He, the Eternal *Prabhu* will
Shower His blessings on to you."

In another *Bachan* the Saint sings:

"O my kind Lord, make this body
The body of Thine violin
Let this head be the top of it (the violin)
The nerves be the tunes."

The saint prays to the Lord to play the role of a violin and wants the Lord to play on it with His own hands the divine melody.

In another *Bachan* the saint says:

"I am the bee of Thine Lotus feet
O Lord look at me and see my tongue
It has been sweetened with Thine Holy Name
At the reflected glow of the moon of Thine face
My two eyes have been graced and dazzled
Thine endless thought has
Enjoined my days and nights
At the melody of Thine Hymns
My ears are ever full"!

This is the voice of an enlightened sage. This is a portrait of a painter who portrays the Lord on the spot!

Yet in another song, the enlightened sage Basaweswara sings in ecstasy:

"Whenever I cast my eyes
I find only you and you alone

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This endless universe is only
Manifested as your reflection
You only are the two eyes of the universe
You are the blossomed lotus,
My face, shoulder, hands, legs are only you.
O the Ruler of the universe!
O Kudala Sangameswara!
The sky studded with million twinkling stars!
Reflects only your endless creation
They are eternal, endless and infinite like you
They are graceful and bright like you.

The Saint was not in favour of construction of big temples. Human heart is a dwelling temple, he asserts. In another famous hymn the Saint says:

"O Lord, let those who have vast wealth
Build temples for you.
How can a poor man like me do that?
My two legs are pillars.
On them stand my body—Thine temple
On my head is the dome of the temple.
O Lord, the temple built of bricks and wood
Will crumble down one day and will mingle with dust.
My body is an enlightened one.
It will be run like a moving temple
Spreading Thine Holy Name.
That would last long and (the Name)
Will live till eternity!"

The message of the Saint has been clearly conveyed in a famous *Bachana*. There are three elements of *Shiva* philosophy. *Pashu*, *Paap* and *Pashupati*.

"The unfortunate creature has fallen into a hole
How will it save itself?
Helplessly how long can he struggle with his legs?

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He will have to call his Lord
In the hope of saving himself from death.
Just like that O devotee, O creature,
Call your *Pashupati* earnestly
Tell him O Lord, O the kind hearted,
Hold me up from the deep hole
Before sin and dirt cover me up
Let my salvation come through
Thine Holy hands!''

In a famous hymn the Saint says that mere repetition of the holy name will not serve any purpose. One must have full faith in Him. He sings:

"No purpose will be served by merely
muttering the Name by mouth
The call of *Prabhu* is merely meaningless
Where it is uttered without any faith.
Stand up once with confidence and
His heart will melt full faith
Prabhu Sangameswar will come forward
'Here I am, I am here' on His lips."

The saint, like all other previous sages, insisted on single minded devotion to the Lord: "*Sri Asutosh* is happy only with a clear hearted sincere call. He wants nothing else." These self realised expressions coincide with the *mantras* on *Shivapuja*, particularly of *Shivaratiri* festival.

The enlightened incarnation of *Shiva* gives vivid description of the undying bliss of mind after a vision of the Lord. In one of his immortal messages he writes:

"When the mind is in tune with the Lord
Man forgets earthly desires and passions.
One who seeks shelter at His feet
One who surrenders himself to Him
Has no discrimination, no difference and sense of inequality.

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One who deals in divine love
And dips deep in that nectar-wealth
Cares not for any other wealth
He brushes them aside easily
The devotee who has attained the divine eternal peace
Does not get ruffled in life.
Errors are away from him
He has crossed over jealousy, pride for good
The Great Lord has spread His seat, in his Heart!"

The Saint left everything in life.

He left a Prime Ministership. He threw aside the throne. He left even his best loved fellow devotees. He finally devoted all his attention to Lord *Sangameswar*.

This hymn is very much like the famous lines which read

mukang karoti bachalang pangung langhayatay girim,
Yat kripa Tvamahang vanday Paramananda Madhabam.

By His blessings the dumb becomes talkative, the lame crosses the ocean!

Basava writes in his hymn!
"With Thine blessings the impossible turns possible.
The dry branch blossoms into green
The withering leaves get new life
When Thine compassion is showered
A desert turns into a green land.
Fatal poison turns into nectar
O Lord Kudal Sangama Deva
Thine blessings always
assemble abundance in everything."

Saint Basaweswara has left a permanent imprint in the history of Indian culture. His life itself is a message to the whole of India. He played the same role that King Janaka did in ancient time. He ruled the kingdom by the left hand and counted rosaries by the right. He showed how a man can leave everything including a kingdom for his love for God. He has shown that renunciation is the final way to salvation. He,

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as a Prime Minister, never lived lavishly. He spent the whole extra money in the service of his fellow devotees whom he served as manifestation of God. Even as a Prime Minister he looked to his servants as manifestation of God. He never believed in caste system. He looked to all as equal. He finally left everything including his beloved devotees and fully got absorbed in his deity *Sangameswar*, an incaranation of *Shiva*.

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MUINUDDIN CHISTI

(1142 AD—1236 AD)

The greatest of the Muslim Saints in India, Muinuddin Chisti commands the respect of all Indians irrespective of their religious faith. Thc outstanding role of this servant of the Prophet in bringing an emotional integration in India has been unique. His influence on the masses as a guide of God-realisation has been unique and unparalleled. Chisti is a household name in India and a common belief with all—rich and poor, learned or illiterate—is that the Saint fulfils every body's desire. All prayers are granted by him. Million pilgrims reach his holy shrine every year from far and near with their *minnats*. He was one of the pioneers to bring to India the holy message of the Prophet—the message of universal brotherhood of men.

All scholars agree that long before the Muslim adventurists stormed India, it was a band of mystic sufis who settled in India silently and they brought with them a message of peace and harmony. They infused a new vigour in Indian philosophy. It was a happy blending of the *Upanishadas* and the message of the Prophet—universal brotherhood of man. Before the establishment of Muslim rule, the mystic saints appeared on the scene and stole the hearts of millions. They won the hearts of the masses before the invaders won the battles.

The pioneer among these mystic saints was Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti whose detailed accounts are not available. His early life accounts are not known. He lived for ninety four years. He was born in 1142 AD and passed away in 1236 A.D.

Hasrat Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti was the greatest saint of the Chisti *Silsila*. He is described as the foremost of the Sufi saints. He reached Indian soil before the battle of Tarain and settled at Ajmer which being the citadel of Chauhan power was a great religious centre. The land is a holy pilgrimage.

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Puskar is visited by thousands of pilgrims from long distances. He came to India during the reign of Prithvi Raj Chauhan or Rai Pithora. His message of universal brotherhood of man, the main message of the Prophet immediately attracted the attention of one and all.

Chisti *Silsila* has become a part of Indian culture. It is a *Silsila*, an important sect. What does it mean? Chisti, originally derives its origin from a famous town of Khorasan. A large number of god-men had set up a religious centre at Chisti.

By and by the town attracted attention of thousands of spiritually hungry people whose search for peace and exploring of Truth attracted them just like bees' attraction for flowers. So the "Organisation and system obtaining there came to be known as Chisti after the name of the town where it was located."

Details about the early lives of these great divine persons are not known. But the records show that the first Saint to whose name the title was used as *Chisti* was Hazrat Khwaja Abulshagre Shami who-died in 940 A.D.

According to Dr. S.A.A. Rizvi,

"Both medieval and modern scholars have showered copious praise on Khwaja Mu inu'd-Din Chisti, but no reliable information regarding his early life, before he settled in Ajmer, remains. The only information recorded is the name of the area where he was born, the name of his teacher, and the fact that he had travelled widely. Strangely enough, the voluminous book, *Khairu'l-Majalis*, does not mention Khwaja Mu'inu'd-Din in any connection, and the Fewa 'idu'l-Fu'-ad refers to him merely in passing."

According to all records in history "within about a hundred and fifty years of his death the Khwaja had become a legend in India."

According to a literary source,

"Khwaja Mu'inu'd-Din Chisti was the embodiment of sufi virtues and famous for his outstanding spiritual achievements, which included the performance of miracles. He was the *Khalifa* of Khwaja 'Usman Harwani, an eminent Chishti sufi who lived in Nishapur. Khwaja Mu'inu'd-Din related that after he had entered the service of Khwaja 'Usman Harwani

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had been enrolled as his disciple, he then served his master for twenty years without a moment's rest. Finding him steadfast both in service and the practice of spiritual exercises, the Khwaja passed on to his disciple divine blessings which he himself had acquired."

The greatest disciple of Hazrat Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti, Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya tells us that his *guru* came to India during the reign of Rai Pithora, whose capital was at Ajmer and became extremely popular with masses.

Obviously the ruler did not welcome the popularity of the Saint.

Abul Fazl, the brightest gem of Akbar's court writes, the Saint "settled himself in Ajmer lighted innumerable lights and thousands and thousands of people got enlightened from his teachings."

According to Abul Fazl's *Aini Akbari* Hazrat Muinuddin Chisti was born in 537 Hizri i.e., 1142 A.D.

"The Chisti order of Sufis is essentially an Indian one. Other branches emanating from the town of Chisti in modern Afghanistan did not survive for long in the Perso—Islamic world." According to a modern scholar, "Khwaja Mu'inu'd-Din laid the foundations of the Chisti order in India and worked out its principle at Ajmer, the seat of Chauhan power. No authentic details are available about the way he worked in the midst of a population which looked askance at every foreigner. It appears that his stay was disliked by Prithvi Raj and the caste Hindus but the common people flocked to him in large number.

According to Dr. K.A. Nizami,

"Ajmer was not merely the seat of Chauhan power; it was a religious centre also where thousands of pilgrims assembled from far and near. Shaikh Mu'inu'd-Din's determination to work out the principles of Islamic mysticism at a place of such political and religious significance shows great self-confidence. Unfortunately, no details are available about the way he worked in the midst of a population which looked askance at every foreigner. It cannot, however, be denied that his stay in Ajmer must have been a serious trial for the principles of the Chishti *Silsila*. On his success or failure in Ajmer depended the future of the Muslim mystic movement in Hindustan.

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Some of his sayings, as recorded by Mir Khurd, supply the quintessence of his religious and social ideology and reveal him as a man of wide sympathies, catholic views and deep humanism."

(*Some aspects of religion and politics in India during the thirteenth century*, Aligarh, 1961, p. 184).

But there are views about the Saint's appearance at Lahore first and then shifting over to Ajmer.

It is observed, "From Lahore Khwaja Mu'inu'd-Din Chishti went to Delhi and then to Ajmer, which was ruled by Rai Prithvi Raj. One cannot think without admiration of this man, almost alone, living among people who considered the least contact with a Muslim as defilement. Sometimes he was refused water to drink. In the torrid climate of Rajputana this was the hardest punishment one can imagine. The high-caste priests demanded of the Raja of Ajmer that he should banish the Khwaja, whose influence had begun to make itself felt among the lower classes of the place. The Raja sent the order of expulsion through Ram Deo, head of the priests of Ajmer. Legend relates that in approaching the Khwaja, Ram Deo was so much impressed by his personality that he became, from that moment, a faithful disciple of the Khwaja and spent the rest of his life in the service of the helpless and down-trodden. After the death of the Khwaja in 1234; his numerous disciples continued his apostolic work."
(Yusuf Hussain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, Bombay, 1957, p. 37.")

According to legends prevalent both in India and Iran the Saint was born in 1142-43 in Sijist'an and brought up in Khurasan. Khwaja Ghiyasuddin Hasan, his father was a deeply religious man. He died when Muinuddin was hardly fifteen. The father left a garden and a water mill. As the child was working in the garden a holy man, Ibrahim Qunduzi was passing that way. The kind child brought him in his garden, offered him some grapes.

The holy man "took out some sesame seeds, chewed them and put them in Muinuddin's mouth." A great spiritual wave thrilled the young boy. He felt himself an enlightened soul. A great change overtook him. Muinudd-in was convinced all worldly things were meaningless. They have no

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meaning in life. He spent some days in Samarkand and Bukhara devoting himself to the study of the Holy *Qoran* and religious scriptures.

Khwaja Sahib left Bukhara for Harwan near Nishapur. There under the able guidance of Shaikh 'Uaman Harwani, Khwaja Sahib devoted himself to deep meditation for about three years.

The Saint visited the contemporary religious scholars from place to place. He went to Lahore. from where he left for Delhi. In Delhi the saint lived at a spot which is now marked by the grave of Shaikh Rashid Makki.

Wherever the Saint went he was surrounded by people. They came tc know about the Saint's spiritual power. At Ajmer the Saint proclaimed nine principles of a divine life which he received from a wandering *dervish* and noted down by his disciple Hamuddin Nagauri. They were.

(i) One should earn money.
(ii) One should not borrow money from anyone.
(iii) One should not reveal to anyone nor seek help from anyone if one has eaten nothing, even for seven days.
(iv) If one gains plenty of food, money, grain or clothing, one should not keep anything until the following day.
(v) One should not curse anyone; if anyone is very hurt, one should pray to God to guide one's enemy towards the right path.
(vi) If one performs a virtuous deed, one should consider that the source of the virtue is due either to one's *pir's* kindness, to the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad on one's behalf, or to divine mercy.
(vii) If one performs an evil deed one should consider one's evil self responsible for the action, and try to protect oneself from such deeds. Fearing God, one should be careful to avoid actions which may involve him again in evil.
(viii) Having fulfilled all the above conditions, one should regularly fast during the day and spend the night in prayer.

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(ix) One should remain quiet, and speak only when it is imperative to do so. The *Shari'a* makes it unlawful both to talk incessantly and keep totally silent. One should utter only such words as those which please God.

These were the main ideas on which the great Saint based his immortal preachings. These were the only ways to lead one to ecstatic love for the Almighty. These were the ways to lead one to a State where one finds no difference between the lover, the beloved and love itself.

Here again one may hear the same immortal voice of India when the Khwaja says,

"The distinguishing mark of one who had recognized God was his flight from crowds of people (*Khalaq*). The *Hajjis* walked around the Ka'ba, but the *'arifs* (spiritualists) circumtabulated the heart. The most superior kind of worship was to assist the helpless and to feed the hungry. All those posessing the following three virtues were friends of God : munificence like an ocean, kindness like the sunshine and humility like the earth."

The Saint visited Delhi twice. He used to live with his illustrious disciple Khwaja Qutbuddin Bhaktiyar Kaki. Sultan Iltutmish offered Muiuddin Chisti many gifts including land but every time the Saint declined. But because of repeated requests of his son—the Saint was married and had children,—he finally had visited the royal court. Iltutmish was exceedingly happy. He invited his beloved Saint to stay in the royal palace. This was not acceptable to him. He preferred staying with his disciple Qutbuddin Bhakhityar Kaki Sahib. The king happily granted him a *farman*.

Khwaja Muinuddin passed away in Ajmer in Mareh, 1236 AD. The constant companion Khwaja Hussain Nagaruri constructed a brick tomb on his grave. Later on a stone cenotaph was also constructed. Many royal admirers and people constructed different gates, arches and other minor memorials to honour the idol of their heart. Mahmud Khilji built *Buland Darwaza* in honour of the Saint.

Akbar was much fascinated by the Saint's preaching mainly through his adviser Abul Fazl. In January 1562 Akbar visited

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the shrine. It seems all his philonthropic and humanitarian activities started only after the visit.

Akbar's son, Jehangir also paid homage by offering food to five thousand poor before the Shrine. Jehangir's son, Shahjehan too visited the Shrine and offered his tribute. Aurangzeb also visited the Shrine. It is said that because of his orthodox restrictions the emperor did not allow the musicians to sing in glory of the Saint in his presence so the authorities of the Shrine refused to accept the royal gifts. Aurangzeb some how changed his mind and went to Ajmer for a second time. This time he allowed the musicians to continue their songs in praise of the Saint. Aurangzeb was overwhelmed with the music in praise of Hazrat Sahib and "paid the musicians double the normal gift."

The main reason of the unique popularity of Hazrat Muinuddin Chisti Sahib among the masses was his liberal views. He laid greatest emphasis in service to Man. It is recorded that when asked about the highest form of devotion to God, Shaikh Sahib replied that "it was nothing but redressing the misery of those in distress, fulfilling the needs of the helpless; and feeding the hungry." He emphasised on developing "review like generosity, sun-like affection and earth-like hospitality."

He preached unity of being, very similar to the ideas of the *Upanishads*. In adopting this the great saint established an ideological relationship with the main source of Hindu religious thought. "As a working idea in social life, it meant equality of all men, the essential unity of all religions and freedom from all religious prejudices."

This had a tremendous impact on existing Indian social order particularly in a community where caste system had defeated its purpose. In its worst mutilated form this orthodox system which initially was introduced with the principle of division of labour started acting in an erratic manner. The Saint's message of equality came as a great boon. All learned men of contemporary world, the enlightened circles, bowed their heads to the greatness of the Saint. It was in Baghdad that the great scholar and mystic dervesh Khwaja Qutbuddin Baktiyar Kaki met him and immediately was dazed by his learning and spiritual power. He accepted his discipleship and left every-

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thing to join him in India. He was also indirectly the *guru* of the most devoted mystic Sufi Buba Farid who in fact was a direct disciple of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. He could foresee the future possibility of Baba Farid's greatness and advised his illustrious disciple to give him special spiritual power. He was an incarnation of love.

Not only a great symbol of love, the Saint was a symbol of simplicity. At a time when the country was ridden with the evils of casteism, thousands lived in utter humiliation and misery, the voice of equality came as a new message. The Khwaja looked to rich and poor alike.

The greatest man of the age, founder of a respected tradition and a heritage respected throughout the world used to live in a small hut and used to sit clothed in a torn *do-jali chadar*. He did not have or take bread of more than five miqual in weight. His eyes had such a penetrating power that whomsoever he looked at with concentration was deeply affected and gave up evil and immoral evils. Although there is no historical evidence, traditions say that even Prithviraj Chauhan accepted the discipleship of the Saint.

Definitely the Saint reached India before the invasion of Mohammad Ghori. After the conquest of Mohammad Ghori and Qutbuddin Ajmer lost much of its importance. The capital of the Sultanate at first at Lahore, was shifted to Delhi. That did not affect the Khwaja. He preferred staying in Ajmer and pursue his spiritual and religious mission with great zeal. He sent his illustrious disciple Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki to Delhi to carry the mission. The other was Sheikh Hamiduddin Sawali Nagauri, who stayed at Nagauri, who used to till his small piece of land. Very much like the *guru*, he used to clothe himself in *Chadar*—one round the body and the other over the shoulder. He was absolutely unattached devotee. He declined the offers of the ruler of Nagore. He is known as "a tiller saint". He wrote one of the most authentic books on Sufism. He lived a long life and breathed his last in 1273.

The other illustrious disciple had been carrying on the message of the Master in Delhi, at that time the most important centre of learning.

The Imam's post was offered to Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar but he declined. The Imam and his limited followers wanted to corner

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the Sufi Saint. Fortunately Hazrat Muinuddin too was also present in Delhi. He got so much infuriated that he asked his disciple to leave the capital immediately. They left Delhi. But the Delhi citizens did not like it. They followed all the Sufi saints on foot. They covered miles. Finally even the emperor joined the masses and prayed to the Sufi spiritual leader to spare his disciple of Delhi. That was allowed. People were happy. The emperor expressed his satisfaction and deep gratitude at the gesture of the Saints. "The staying of Bakhtiyar Kaki in Delhi was a boon to the Chisti—Silsila as the latter propagated the spiritual teaching of the Chisti Silsila and contributed a great deal to the improvement of the social, religious and spiritual life of a host of his disciples in projecting the ideas of a higher moral values for the common man."

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BABA FARID, THE GREAT SUFI SAINT

(1173 AD—1265 AD)

Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i- Shakar, the great Sufi Saint, was one of the greatest path finders of India. By a miracle, stones kept in his mouth to avoid greed during long lasting periods turned into sugar and it was known to all--*Shakar* means sugar. He is most popularly known as Baba Farid. He is equally respected both by Muslim and Hindu devotees.

The Saint was "one of the most revered and distinguished of medieval Muslim mystics. He lived at a very significant period of hectic and restless political activity. At a time when the entire country was resounding with the din and clatter of the Churian arms, he sat cool and taught lessons of human love and affection. He strove day and night to create the atmosphere of love in the discordant element of society."

The saint was an enlightened soul. Like all other great saints of India, Baba Farid realised God as 'an all-embracing personality present in his ethical, intellectual and aesthetic experience and furnishing the inspiration for creating an ideal realm of values—the kingdom of heaven in distress and struggle'. The Saint was always in a blissful state of mind.

The mystic saint represents the vision of Indian spiritual heritage when he says, "In both the worlds Thou alone art the subject that I cherish; I die for Thee and I live for Thee."

If some one likes to compare the feelings of the Saint with that of the saints who appeared on the scene before or after him, they will find it difficult to distinguish between one and another.

His spiritual experiments were very much similar to some *Hatha Yogis*. His statements had many similarities with those of Guru Nanak or Sri Chaitanya or Kabir or Sri Ramakrishana Paramahansa. The Saint, like Ramprasad or Ramakrishna, to quote some of the later saints of the country, felt

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the presence of God shadowing him every moment. According to his biographer, Dr. K.A. Nizami, "This consciousness of the Divine presence around him was the guide and motive of his active walking life and gave it a transcendent worth. He strove to understand Him, in His dynamic relation to this finite world. This mystic belief in God had a value in terms of human life. It made him citizen of that universal society in which God is the Supreme Intelligence and all human beings His manifestations."

This was indeed brilliant analytical description ! This was experienced in the lives of all great Saints who dedicated their lives in search of Truth and all of whom came to the same conclusions. God is not attained by bookish knowledge. He is not to be revealed by discussion. He has to be realised. Sufism has infused into Indian philosophy some of the highest thoughts. "The language of experience in the pursuit ol the path is more vocal than pure logic or expression in words."

Baba Farid always uttered noble sayings only from his self-realised knowledge. Keeping in tune with the earlier great saints of this land of the Himalayas, Baba Farid observed from his own realisation that the keen desire for the final enlightenment cannot come to anybody just like that. It has got to be cultivated. "His existence could be felt only through proper cultivation of emotion." *Dard* was the source of all human spiritual virtues. The divine messenger would always shower his sympathy and kindness on all present by wishing them to cultivate *dard*. Does this *dard* mean only pain? Is it ordinary human curiosity for the welfare of others ? Does it mean sympathy and fellow feeling for all ?

His illustrious disciple Nizamuddin Auliya explained this message of the Master as "an eye full of tears and a heart full of emotions." What was this emotion for? Was it compassion for all? India heard from another great son of the soil more than two thousand five hundred years ago a message of compassion for all. That was the main message of Lord Buddha. Just about two thousand years ago the world heard the echo of the same from the Holy Christ. All messengers of God speak in the same language.

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Why did Farid turn a mendicant? Was he renouncing the family and got dedicated to spiritual pursuit because of poverty? Was it because of frustration? Was it due to some reason to relieve him of some personal failure in life and rely on an escape from realities? No. He was more or less a born spiritual man. That was mainly because of his family environments. Great spiritual power can never ascend suddenly. Both father, Qadi Shoaib and mother Qarsum were deeply religious. Both were from distinguished families. Qadi had come from Kabul finally and settled at Qasur near Lahore. Baba Farid was born in 1175 AD and he died in 1265 AD. His most illustrious disciple was Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya. His mother was the most devoted lady in the family. She would spend whole nights in holding prayers. She attained so great spiritual power that her face beamed brightly even in darkness. It is said once some robbers entered her house at dead of night. When they saw the lady deeply engrossed in meditation "they were so much moved by a hallow of piety and saintliness which radiated from her face that they repented of their sins and vowed to lead an honest life thereafter." Not only that, one of the robbers Jamali, the most furious of the lot, turned a saintly person. People used to visit him to get his blessings ! The touchstone was indeed so strong that whatever came near it became gold ! That was the influence of the mother. It is no wonder that the son would become an eminent Saint. The child used to follow the mother's footsteps right from early days.

Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi, a great contemporary mystic, was once passing through the town. Just out of curiosity perhaps he asked local folk whether any spiritual saint lived in the neighbourhood. They knew of no such saint. They heard about Farid, a youngster spending hours after hours in prayers. He would be found only in the Masjid. But he was too young. Jalaluddin Tabrizi did not want to take any chance. His mind yearned to have a look at this young devotee. Is he the person he is so eagerly looking for? His mind felt a ripple. He was, after all, a god-sent man. His steps cannot be wrong. Somebody else standing nearby said, "Yes, you may find him in the mosque. But what will you do with him? He is no better than mad !" Jalaluddin was happy. The Sheikh got heartened. This must be the man of his heart. But he has not brought anything

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for Farid: How will he meet Him? You need not bring anything. You only think of it most sincerely. The thing will be in your hand in no time, The gift immediately came into the hand of the mystic. A kind man offered a pomegranate to the wondering Saint. Jalaluddin was happy. Pomegranate is a pure fruit. He reached Baba Farid and happily offered the fruit to the young boy. But what is this? He does not accept it. 'I am on fast. Thanks', he said, I am observing *Ramazan*.' The Sheikh, who had broken the fruit himself and had offered it to Farid was slightly offended and took it back. Jalaluddin left the place. At sunset the young child found a pomegranate seed lying on the ground. He took it at the time of *iftar*. What a change ! A great spiritual wave stirred the whole body. "What a fool I had been to have rejected the offer of this great saint who came on his own at my door.", the child murmered.

Baba Farid's mind pined for the holy man. At the same time there was a thrill. He knew he was now having new spiritual power. One realises the value of a thing only after one loses it. Baba Farid could not realise the presence of the great Sheikh so long as he was standing before him. He refused the pomegranate too on the plea of observing *Ramazan*. He could have preserved the fruit after accepting it from the man. That was not to be. Perhaps that was not necessary either.

It has been experienced that spirtual power is transmitted from one to the other in many ways. Sometimes through utterance of some *Mantra* through the ears, sometimes by mere physical touch, sometimes in other varied methods. The Sheikh had done his part in his own way by offering the seed of a pomegranate. That was sufficient. The whole fruit was not necessary.

Later on when the Saint had opportunity to discuss the matter with the contemporary Saint Sheikh Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar, Baba Farid lamented a lot for the lapse. But the Sheikh consoled him by saying, "The whole spiritual blessing was in that one seed; it was destined for you and it reached you. There was nothing in the rest of the fruit."

At the age of eighteen, Farid was sent to Multan, the seat of learning in medieval India for higher education. He was a devout savant of God. The first thing that Baba Farid did in

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Multan was to memorise the whole of *Holy Quran*. He would recite the whole of the text at least once during the twenty four hours. During this period the great spiritual leader Khwaja Qutbuddin Bhaktiyar Kaki paid a visit to Multan. Baba Farid knew he had come there to enlighten him. He rushed to the mosque and silently and patiently waited for a meeting with the *Guru*. When the spiritual leader asked Baba his intention, the humble devotee fell at his feet and said,

"He who is approved by you, is approved eternally
and no one is disappointed of your blessing
Your mere attention to any particle even for a while
Makes it better than a thousand suns!"

Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki initiated Baba Farid at Multan. Baba Farid was just eighteen. He accompanied the spiritual *guru* to Delhi. Because of the jealousy of the religious head of the State when Saint Muinuddin Chisti asked Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki Sahib to leave Delhi and join him at Ajmer, Baba Farid also got ready for the holy place. In fact they had already covered a distance when the emperor of Delhi Iltutmish himself rushed to get back all the three Saints. He pursuaded Muinuddin Chisti to allow Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki to stay back in Delhi along with the people of Delhi. Baba Farid too stayed back with his spiritual preceptor.

Baba Farid came in very close touch with all the top Sufi saints of the country because of his discipleship of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki who was the most illustrious disciple of Muinuddin Chisti Sahib.

The Saint did not believe in miracles, yet this extra ordinary power came to him spontaneously. Baba Farid, once put some pieces of stones into his mouth after a continuous fast for three days. The pieces of stones turned into sugar. The saint was surprised. He thought it was the work of some evil spirit. So he threw that sugar away. He continued his fast. At midnight he again took some pieces of stones and started chewing them due to hunger. The stone pieces again turned into sugar and he threw it away. This happened every time the Saint put stones into his mouth. He finally took the sugar and reported the matter to Qutbuddin Sahib. He permitted him to accept

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whatever came from divine sources. Ever since Baba Farid became known as *Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i- Shakar*. *Ganj-i-Shakar* means store of sugar.

The spiritual preceptor, Khawaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki Sahib used to supervise spiritual performance of the disciple step by step. Baba Farid was also extremely lucky to have the constant guidance of the greatest saint of the thirteenth century India-Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti, his *guru's guru*. The Saint used to visit Delhi sometimes to look after his disciple. He took a great fancy for the young ascetic. He desired his disciple to shower extra blessings on him. The disciple immediately agreed but was hesitating to bless him. When a senior is present this is the prerogative of the senior most only. So both joined together spontaneously in showering their blessings on Baba Farid. Recording this incident Dr. K.A. Nizami writes:

"Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti happened to visit Delhi again. When he saw Baba Farid he remarked; 'Baba Bakhtiyar! You have caught a noble falcon which will not build his nest except on the holy tree of Heaven. Farid is a lamp that will illuminate the *Silsilah* of the *Durweshes*.' Khwaja Muinuddin then asked his disciple to bestow spiritual gifts and blessings on Baba Farid but Shaikh Qutbuddin apologised that in the presence of his Master he could not have the courage to bestow anything on him. Thereupon both the saints blessed Baba Farid. It was a unique honour in the history of the *Chisti Silsilah*. No Saint before him or even after was thus blessed by the master and the master of his master."

This great incident has been immortalised by a poet who wrote:

The two saints have bestowed the two worlds on thee,
Thou hast received kinship from these kings of the age,
The realms of this and the other world certainly belong to thee
The entire creation has been in fact assigned to thee.

All great saints of India—Buddhists, Jains, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Muslims—have come to one great conclusion that heart was the dwelling place of the Almighty. All our

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efforts to have divine enlightenment will go waste if the heart is not thoroughly prepared to receive the great spiritual power. A small bulb cannot stand electric power more than its capacity. Union with God is possible only through a regular drill of prayers and fasts. Our great Sufi scholars too come to the same conclusion. "The heart is the only medium which could set the finite in tune with the Infinite. The entire mystic journey in all its stages had to be undertaken with the help of heart and it was through prayers and penitences that it could be made responsive to divine messages."

That was also the message of the *Upanishads*. That was the main message of Tagore's world famous book of verses *Gitanjali*.

Antara mamo bikashita karo
Antara taro hay

On the great Lord dwelling in the heart, enlighten my inner soul! Without this enlightenment of the heart the long journey is simply futile.

Baba Farid realised this great truth. The pious mother had taught him this at a very early one. So there is nothing to wonder to hear that "All the Sheikhs of India are unanimous in declaring that no saint has excelled Ganj-i- Shakar in his devotion and penitences. In fact his life is one long story of prayers, vigils and fasts. There penitences not only purified his inner self but opened his soul to the indwelling power of God."

Baba Farid always avoided a crowd for holding prayers and meditation. He was given a cell by Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki who was well versed with the aptitude of the disciple's spiritual pursuit in his own ways. According to Dr. S.A.A. Rizvi, "Baba Farid lived in a small cell near the *jamâ-atkhana* and under guidance performed severe ascetic exercises. His austerities so impressed Khwaja Muinuddin during his visit to Delhi that he took a special interest in Baba Farid, prophesied his later fame and asked Khwaja Qutbuddin to join him in prayer for his disciple's future greatness."

Baba Farid wanted to follow the most difficult penance. "The severities already practiced in his Delhi cell failed to satisfy him and he asked his master if he could perform a *chilla*

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which involved spiritual exercise and fasting for forty days. The Khwaja finally permitted him to perform a *chilla-i-ma'kus* (inverted *chilla*). Ignorant of the details he asked Badru'd-Din Ghaznawi to obtain them from the Khwaja who replied that it required a man to tie a rope around his feet and remain suspended in a well head down for forty days and nights while both fasting and praying. The Baba found a lonely mosque in Uch and taking the *muazzin* into his confidence performed the *chilla-i-ma'kus*."

Contemporary stories even tell us that 'birds had built their nests on the body of Sheikh Farid' when he went in deep meditation. Great scholars like Dr. Nizami describe it as a "good fiction but not sober history". The description, however, cannot simply be brushed aside like this. There are many stories about many great saints deeply absorbed in meditation being physically mutilated without caring for the body. Mahavira's body was partially chopped off when He was deeply absorbed in meditation and yet He did not know anything about it. They lifted Him up and threw Him away thinking the saint to be dead! Ramana Maharshi spent months in a dark underground cave in a temple and was rescued by a devotee who saved Him from hundreds of lieeches and scorpions! The whole body was full of wounds and sores. Similarly a member of the Tagore family, an ardent worshipper of *Brahma*, used to sit for hours in deep meditation and once a crow pecked the eye thinklng the person to be a dead man! May be that the nest was not built on the Saint's body. It is quite likely that birds might have come to explore possibilities of building nests. The main point is Baba Farid's penitence was a vigorous drill. None can question that. It is quite probable that some crows must have pecked his eyes while the Saint had been sitting deeply in meditation, Otherwise why did he compose the song "Oh crow peck not my body. Fly off, I beg of thee, because within my body dwells my beloved."

The best way of self purification is through constant fasts. Lord *Shiva* of the Hindus says, according to the *mantras* uttered on *Shivavatri*, that he needs no other offerings if the devotee only keeps a fast. *Ramazan* is observed as amonth of self purification by continuous day fasts for thirty days. Quoting

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Imam Gazhali, the great saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya says, perhaps to explain the frequent fasts of his *pir*, "Fasting is one half of self control and self control is one half of faith". To Baba Farid, fasting was a great tool to accumulate spiritual power. According to Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, Baba Farid "seldom missed his fasts and these fasts were kept in this way that the Sheikh did not take anything at *Sahr*."

The Saint had unstinted devotion and complete faith in his Master. His resistance to go on a *Haj* pilgrimage was a proof. It was perhaps the most cherished desire of the *Durwesh* to go on a pilgrimage to Macca and Medina. But how could he go there leaving the Master? And how could he break the tradition? Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki never talked of *Haj* pilgrimage. Baba Farid did not know the reason. But he simply did not dare try to supersede the Master. On some occasions he even started for the holy land but returned immediately. That was a great unfulfilled desire of the Saint.

The financial miseries loomed large over him always.

On many occasions because of utter poverty he had to face starvation. His confidence in the Almighty did not shake a bit. Anybody could hear the Saint muttering the same promise of dedication:

"I did for Thee and I
Live for Thee."

There is nothing in this great world but God. There is no greater Truth. The Saint, in spite of his grim poverty, was always in ecstacy. He was always cheerful. He wanted only three things from the Almighty: "Happy time, tears and repose of heart." And he had all the three in abundance. He was always in a blissful state of mind.

After the demise of the preceptor, Baba Farid became the Head of *Chisti Silsila*. Khwaja Qutbuddin did it in his own life time. Delhi was too crowded for peaceful meditation and the Saint begged of his *Guru's* permission to go to Hansi: The *Guru* told him that it was perhaps their last meeting. "Go, it has been pre-ordained that you will not be present at the time of my death." He had great power of intuition. Then and there Qutbuddin held an assembly and told the beloved

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disciple "May place is yours." There were many aspirants for this great honour. Sheikh Badruddin Ghaznavi for instance was one of them. They were not very happy. But they knew it well that none could dare approaching the master to change his mind.

Baba Farid had an intuition about the demise of his most beloved preceptor.

"The night on which Sheikh Qutbud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki was to depart for the world beyond, Baba Farid dreamt that his master was calling him to his presence. At dawn he left for Delhi. The messenger who was sent for Delhi to convey the sad news to Baba Farid met him in the way. Baba Farid hastened to the capital and reached there on the fourth day. Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri handed over the mystic regalia to him. Baba Farid offered two *rakats* (genuflexions) of prayer, put the *khirgah* on his head and then proceeded to the house of his deceased master and sat in his place. Shaikh Qutb-u 'd-din has also wished him to marry his widow but Baba Farid expressed his inability to do that."

The saint did not like the idea of stopping any poor man from meeting him. He was a saint of strong principles. About the Saint's departure from Delhi it is said that once a pilgrim came to meet the *Peer* from Hansi. The Saint had taken over the leader ship of the Sufi World in India from Hazrat Qutbuddin Bakh tiyar Kaki Sahib. He just came to Delhi from Hansi. The pilgrim whose name was Sarhanga came all the way from Hansi or foot. He waited at the door of the saint for a number of days. But the disciples who kept a guard at the gate would not allow him to go inside and meet Baba. He did not return to Hansi. He waited to go inside and meet Baba. It so happened the saint came out one day. He just wanted perhaps to have a stroll. Sarhanga was the happiest man. He threw himself at the feet of the Master and narrated to him the whole story of his ordeal.

"Access to you was easy when you were in Hansi, but it is very difficult here," said the weeping pilgrim both in joy and sorrow. He was in ecstacy because he had a *darshan* of the Master. He lamented his ordeal because as a devotee he thought he had a right to visit the Saint.

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The gateman was dazed when the Saint just looked at him. "I am only a messenger of God. These poor people come to me because they love God and they love me. Who authorised you people to stop them from meeting me. Who made this access impossible ?"

All the disciples kept quiet. That was a regular feature of the holy place. They had to restrict entry otherwise all sorts of people would come and disturb the Saint.

People would come at odd hours and with all sorts of queries. Baba Farid said, "Delhi is a land of big people—the royal visitors and high officials. I am not bound by these rules. I am meant for all of them. They are meant for me. I belong to them, they belong to me. So I go from Delhi." He immedately left for Hansi. It is recorded in his biography.

"His friends and disciples in Delhi were surprised at this sudden decision to leave the capital. Sheikh Qutbuddin, they said, had assigned and entrusted this place to you. Why do you go elsewhere?"

"My master's blessings", replied Baba Farid, "will accompany me whether I am here or in the wilderness."

He was very humble: Even after the passing of the *guru* Sheikh Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, when everybody accepted Baba as the religious head of the order, an action sanctified by Qutbuddin Sahib in his life time, Baba did not like to restrict himself just to function as the head of an order and lead a mechanical life. He was convined that relgious pursuit, search for Truth will have to be carried on till one's death. He was appointed successor to Qutbuddin by the khwaja himself. That was in recognition to his spiritual achievement. And yet he did not consider that "the period of his spiritual training was over." He could not avoid crowds. They always followed him. He wanted to concentrate in solitude, at the same time he did not like to turn out anybody who came to him in search of peace. So he decided to shift from one lonely corner to another: Thousands started flocking to him at Hansi. The Saint silently shifted to Kaithal. There too poeple came to know about his presence. So he shifted to Ajodhan. According to some disciples the saint lived there for sixteen years. But some observe that he lived there for twenty four years, till his death.

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Farid was very affectionate. He did not like crowds. But when they came he would accept them with greatest love. He threw open the gates of his house to every one who wished to see him. "Come to me one by one so that I may attend to you individually". In his habits he was quite simple. He was fond of fasts which he kept frequently. On these days he would not take even a drop of water. This was perhaps a training of the mother.

While breaking fasts the food kept before him mostly used to be distributed among the disciples present. He would love to share with them all not only his spiritual thoughts. His generous heart would make him eager to give them whatever just came before him. Baba's regular food was "one third of a bowl of sherbet, a few dried grapes and half a piece of bread." This was all that the saint took during twenty four hours.

The Saint was an extremely disciplined person. He would follow a regular routine, "He took his bath everyday. It was also his daily practice to spend two hours in prostration after the morning prayer. The doors of his room were closed when he was engaged in prayers and no one could enter it as he was busy with his devotion."

The saint's biographor says,

"It is difficult to explain the condition of his emotions when he was alone. He would frequently recite verses and lay his head in prostration. After the *zuhr* prayers the Shaikh received his visitors. He never retired into his room unless he had attended visitors. He never retired into his room unless say: 'There can be no pleasure in devotions so long as there remains a single needy person at the door, After these interviews the Shaikh busied himself with his devotions in his small room. Every night after *iftar* he used to call Shaikh Nizamuddin Aullya when in Ajodhan to his presence. Sometimes Maulana Shihab-uddin or Maulana Ruknuddin also attended. The Shaikh asked them about the happenings of the day, showed a deep concern for the inmates of the *Jama* at *Khangah*."

The main reason of Baba Farid's tremendous popularity among the masses was his address to the public in local

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dialects. He "used to recommend the use of Punjabi for religious purposes."

There are hundreds of such songs in praise of God in original Punjabi by Baba Farid. Some of the most beautiful ones may just be mentioned.

Farida sakkar khand nibat gurh makhiyu manjha dudh
sabey bastu mithian rab na puja tudh

Sugar, honey, candy, molasses and milk, all are sweet but none of these can compare with sweetness of the name of the Lord.

Farida jangal jangal kea bhabahi bankanda modeha
Bansi rab hia liye jangal kia dhudheha

To what avail is your seeking Him amidst thorns and trambles that prick your feet ? He dwells in your heart ?

Uth Farida aju saj subah nibaj gujar
Jo sir sai na bibai so sir kap utar

Get up and offer thy prayers to the Lord, If thy head deos not bow to Him, strike it off.

Farida dil rata is duni sew duni na kitoi kamn
Ek rahay day rahi gaye ek radhi gave ujarh

This world is like unto the sugar coated pill of poison. Beware lest you lose in the game and pass away empty handed.

Farida lodayn dak bijourian kikkar bigoi jat
Handoi un Rataida paidha lonoi pat

If thorns you sow do not expect to reap grapes. If a shirt of wool is to be carded expect no silken garment in return, as you sow so you reap.

Here is a poem which will sound just a transliteration of the message from the Geeta. Baba Farid writes in Punjabi :

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Farida duhkha sukh ek kar dil de lah bikar
Allah bhaboi so bhala tam lobhi darbar

A real saint is he who is indifferent to suffering or comfort. The saints consider them under same category. The saints remember whatever He does for them is for their benefit.

Baba Farid was a poet of the masses. To him poetry came spontaneously. He would utter his blessings or sermons in poems composed on the spot. So thousands of pieces are there. More than five hundred of them been compiled and are available now in print. Most of them deal with spiritual uplift through raising one's moral values and prayer. He paid highest values to prayers. "Pray to God alone, for, everyone else takes away, only He gives. Whatever He gives cannot be taken away." Like his *Guru* Khwaja Qutbuddin, Baba Farid did not like the ignorant. He said, Do not regard the ignorant as among the living. Avoid the ignorant who pose as though they were wise."

Baba Farid hated lies. "He said do not utter a truth which resembles a lie."

One must not deceive another. "Do not sell what people do not wish to buy."

Renunciation is the last word of Indian philosophy. So felt the saint too. "Do not make brick mansions the seat of thy affection. They are so full of dust of ages that they cannot befriend thee."

Like Sankaracharya, Baba Farid said, "The world is ever up to lure us by appearing in variegated colours. It is full of the deadliest poison. He alone escapes it on whom the preceptor casts his glance of grace."

Again like Sankara, Baba says, "The beauty of the body is all vain. Its charms are all useless if through them the love of the Lord is not cherished."

"Discard costly garments, Put on the wool-sack. The Lord is met in poor dress."

Complete surrender to God is necessary. He takes charge of the devotee. So Farid says, "The Lord does not forget thee for a moment and feeds thee. It behoves thee to keep vigils in the night passing the hour in His remembrance. If ye do not do it ye are like a dead man."

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The great Saint of Delhi, Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya learnt at the feet of Baba Farid the highest secrets of the Sufis. Compassion was the keynote. One must feel for his colleagues. "Do not eat everybody's bread but give bread to everybody." "Greed leads to calamity". Baba said, "Treat a calamity as the consequence of greed".

Prayer has to be conducted regularly. It is through regular prayers that one gets blessiness of the Almighty. "Strive to obtain fresh grace every day."

He said, "Be grateful but do not compel others to be grateful; while doing good to others, think that you are helping yourself." One must be polite in his behaviour. "Harshness is a sign of weakness." One must not forget the main path just in the company of dignitaries. "Do not forget religion in the company of State dignitaries."

The saint said, "Glory and honour depend upon equity and justice. A man in his good days must look after as many persons as he can. Be magnanimous during a period of personal affluence." These are only religious sides.

The saint stressed two things, A man cannot afford to neglect two things—time and religion. "Do not consider anything a substitute for religion. There is no compensation for the loss of time." "Make wisdom and solitude your main provision," said Baba Farid. "Calamities have to be faced boldly," Baba said, "Do not flee from calamity sent to you by God".

One must know his own defects. "A person who thinks he is already perfect cannot improve himself and cannot see God." Baba said, "Seek your faults. Acquire wealth honestly in order to be able to retain it. Acquire knowledge through humility. If you wish to make the whole world your enemy, be arrogant."

"Keep your good and bad points secret
If you wish to be great be humble
If you want satisfaction do not be jealous."

This great saint lived and died for God alone:
"I pray to live only for the sake of loving Thee
I wish to become dust and dwell eternally under Thy feet

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My principal expectation from both worlds is that
I should die and live for thee.

Baba Farid said: "Remain always content. Never envy the lot of others. Carry wooden loaf tied to the belly. Eat whatever ye get in alms, looking never to the dainty dishes others enjoy. It behoves thee to be satisfied with thy lot".

Long before Gray wrote in his world famous elegy "paths of glory lead but to the grave", Baba Farid wrote, "They who dwelt in the mansions yesterday and whose arrival and departure was announced by beat of drums, now lie unattended in the grave in the solitary graveyard."

The Saint had the highest regard for the preception. "Seek the enlightened *Guru*. He is like into the deep sea in which you will find the pearl. It serves an ill purpose to seek Him amidst shallow waters."

Baba Farid never claimed a high position. Even after succeeding Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Baba Farid said, "My clothes are all soiled and I am full of sins. Alack, the people are duped by my saintly exterior and call me *durwesh*.

Again Baba Farid says, "The head that does not bow to the Lord, burn it in place of firewood in the oven underneath the kettles." In his vision Baba said, "I thought I alone was a victim of suffering in this world but when I evolved into a higher state I found the world was under the yoke of tyranny."

The evaluation of a saint's contribution is not possible. It is not necessary too. Only time shows the lasting values of one's great work. It is only the eternal value of a great man's contribution that cements dissentions and disharmony in the conflict of ideas and confusion.

The Saint never wanted any high position. He got it time and again but he simply threw it aside. To him prayer was the most important medium of transmission of spiritual power. The person who receives it must also be equally suitable to accept it.

Quite a number of his immortal songs have been included in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. They are recited in thousands of *Gurudwaras*, throughout the world.

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Guru Nanakji, the Great Saint founder of Sikh religion, Himself a noted poet, was fond of singing or listening to Baba Farid's compositions.

A scholar rightly observed, "Baba Farid's position in the history of the *Chishti Silsilah* is unique. Disciple of a great saint, he was the teacher of a still greater saint. His association with Khwaja Qutb-u'd-din Bakhtiyar Kaki on one hand and Shaikh Nizam-u'd-Auliya on the other, gives him a pre-eminent place in the history of the *Chishti Silsilah*. If Khwaja Mu'in-u'd-din Chishti introduced the *silsilah in* India and Khwaja Qutb-u'd-din Bakhtiar Kaki popularised it in Delhi and her neighbourhood, it was through the efforts of Baba Farid that the organisation struck roots into the soil and spread far and wide. His piety, devotion and spiritual excellence attracted seekers after truth from distant parts of India as well as from lands beyond. Very rightly does Islam call him "the ruler of the realm of spiritual discipline (*Shah-i-Mulk-i-Suluk*)".

Not only a vision, the Saint had the subtle touches of imagination. He writes, "The day was passed in agony and the night in suffering pain. The boatman standing opposite remarked, 'The boat is in a whirlpool'."

Prayers and only prayers can bring salvation. Baba Farid insists that not a moment should be wasted in relaxation.

"Remembrance of the Lord in the first part of the night is like gathering flowers and prayers performed at the close of night are like those flowers fructifying. He who shall keep awake the whole night will certainly receive His grace," says Baba. God is merciful. He must bestow His *Karuna*, His grace. Without this grace, nothing is possible.

He warned people against the ecstatic love for God. "Very difficult it is to pursue the path of God's love. The fruits of the past acts one must carry on his head, howsoever heavy be their load."

The Saint had love for the earth. Unlike other Saints who wanted to leave this earth and go to heaven, the Saint appreciated a noble life in a harmonious pleasant earth. "Despise not the earth, for none is greater than it. So long as you are alive you tread it under your feet, but on your death it lies over your head."

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His love for universal brotherhood and deep sympathy for all creatures emanated from inner light. Baba Farid sang; "The world is held by him, and He dwelleth in creation. Knowing this, do not look with disdain on any trivial object, for He pervadeth all of them."

Is there any difference between Baba Farid and the eternal message of *Vedanta ?*

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SRI MADHVACHARYA

(1199 AD—1278 AD)

One of the greatest saints of India who left a permanent imprint on the spirit of Indian culture and who is worshipped by millions even more than six hundred years after his demise is Sri Madhvacharya. He hailed from Kalyanapura near Udupi in South Kanara district. Madhva was an incarnation of renunciation. He identified himself with *Sri Vishnu* so much that his life meant nothing but a living message of the Lord. To him the world meant *Vishnu*. *Vishnu* minus world was *Vishnu* only but the world minus *Vishnu* was a big zero!

Sri Madhva's four decades of hard life of *tyag*, *titiksha* and *tapasya* has taken India thousands of years ahead spiritually. Even after six hundred years of demise, Madhva is still alive in the hearts of those who care for the Noble Path in India and abroad.

The life of Madhva is a most fascinating story. Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva form the *Trinity* of Vedanta in Indian philosophy. To them goes the credit of founding the main schools of thought of *Vedanta*, *Adwaita*, *Vishistadwaita* and *Dwaita*.

In the mainstream of Indian philosophy, Karnataka's contribution has been most significant. It has been observed truly that both *Vedic* and non-*Vedic* schools of Indian philosophy have found their greatest exponents in Karnataka. The three well-known schools of *Vedanta*—*Dwaita*, *Adwaita* and *Vishishtadwaita* and the two non-vedic schools—Jainism and Veerashaivism—are even today popular and living faiths in Karnataka. It has given birth to some of the most distinguished builders of Indian thought like Madhvacharya, Vidyaranya and Vyasaraya. Madhvacharya was the historical founder and the supreme head of the *Uttaradimath*—the fountain head of the *Dwaita* philosophy.

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Madhva, born in the year 1199, was the son of Madhyageha Bhatta, a resident of *Pajakakshetra* or Kalyanpur near Udupi in South Karnataka. An embodiment of devotion and piety, even as a child Madhva used to go out into the woods for communion with his Creator. Sometime later he journeyed alone to the temples in the surrounding country, and there astounded the visitors with his exemplary ways of worship. Madhva was also known as *Vasudeva, Anandatirtha, Purnaprajna* and *Madhyamandara.*

One of the ancient temples in South India is at Udupi of *Ananteswara.* The idol of Shiva stands on a silver pedestal. So people call it *Shivalli* or *Shiva Belli,* the Shiva in silver. Quite a large number of followers of Shiva having their leanings to the *Bhagavata* were flourishing in South Canara. They were mostly Tulu speaking. They are known as *Shivallies.* They represent a fine combination of *Shiva* and *Vishnu* worship. They do not distinguish between *Shiva and Vishnu.* The idols are somewhere known as *Shiva,* somewhere as *Vishnu.* The Udupi temple of Ananteswara is a *Vishnu* temple. The idol is a lingam and looks like Shiva.

Madhyageha Bhatta and his wife Vedavati were followers of the *Shivalli* tradition. Because of his deep learning in history, *puranas* and *Bhagavata,* Madhyageha earned the title of a learned man—*Bhatta.*

About the religious background and ideas followed by this important sect, preaching and practising a harmony between the *Shivas* and *Vaishnavas*, it is recorded that:

"Whether the Brahmins of the day worshipped *Hara* or *Harihara,* whether they were pure *Saivites* or *Bhagavatas,* their philosophy was the *Adwaita* of Sankara. *Pandits* who cared for fame studied the *Adwaitic* system. Madhyageha Bhatta was no exception. But a secession was gradually forming. Madhyageha Bhatta represented the group which was restless and tending to break away from monism. He scrupulously adhered to the duties of the householder's life, faithfully observed the *Ekadasi* and other fasts, performed the ceremonials with all care and worshipped the Lord with genuine piety. He owned some lands but he was not always above want. His first two sons died as infants and he had only a girl left. From his village, he used to go to the temple of

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Ananteswara at Udupi and pray for a son. He prayed day after day for twelve long years and his prayer was finally granted. The temple priest had a vision and he assured Madhyageha Bhatta that by the grace of Ananteswara, god Vayu would incarnate himself as his son ere long."

Details about the great apostle are available in volumes. His life was his message. He worked till his death. He had no leisure. According to most authentic sources, "Sri Madhva was born on the *Vijayadasami* day of the year *Vilambi*, corresponding to 1199 A.D. His childhood name was *Vasudeva*. He had his education under his father from the age of three to eight and after eight, when he was invested with the sacred thread, he studied under one Thottam Thillayya, a learned Brahmin who had a profound knowledge of the *Upanishads*. The course of study included Poetry, *Nyaya Sastra*, the *Vedas* and the *Vedantas*. When he had completed his studies he set out in search of a *Guru* who could give him *Sannyas*, for he felt that he had a mission to fulfil and family life would not suit his purpose. He found his Guru at Udupi itself in the person of Purushothama Theertha, belonging to the Bhandarkara Math, which continues in a flourishing state to this day. Vasudeva was accepted by Purushothama Theertha as a novice on probation. Vasudeva's father was heart-broken at the decision taken by his son without consulting him. He went to the *Math* and implored and entreated his son to go home, but in vain. In desperation, he fell at his son's feet, asking him to relent. Vasudeva replied that the prostration of a father before his son only confirmed the fact that he was already a *Sannyasin*, though a novice. Madhyageha was silenced. He returned home and recounted to his wife all that had passed and both felt a great void in their lives when their only son had thus deserted them. The father wanted to try again to persuade Vasudeva to go back to the house and he went to a place 38 miles from Udupi where Vasudeva was camping with the *Guru*, in the village of Kapooru. This time, Vasudeva yielded a little and promised not to become a *Sannyasin* until a young brother was born. At last the younger brother was born and Vasudeva paid a flying visit to his parents. He told his mother that he must have her permission to take up *Sannyas* and that if it was refused, she might be

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sure that she could never look at his face again, for he would disappear altogether. She gave him the permission though he was only sixteen years old. He waited not a day longer than was absolutely necessary".

This in nutshell is the background of a saint who revolutionised the whole country. His only ally was his deep spiritual power. His only strategy was welfare of man.

The childhood of most of saints in India follows almost the same pattern. The only extraordinary point about Vasudeva was his deep love for temples. He would run after monks and temples even as a minor.

Young Madhva had his *Upanayana* ceremony of the sacred thread, at the due age and was put to a *Vedic* school for three years. There Madhva gave proof of his uncommon intelligence and memory and soon took leave of his village teacher. Inspired with a clear sense of his high mission to restore true knowledge to worthy souls, he soon decided to embrace the life of an ascetic and went in search of a holy preceptor. He found one in *Achyutaprekshacharya*, otherwise called Purushottamatirtha, at Udipi and received his initiation from him. "Having convinced the master of his fitness and also having comforted his parents, especially his mother whose tender appeal and prayers he would not refuse to listen to, he hastened to become a *sannyasin* as soon as a brother was born to him."

Young Madhva astounded the scholars with his natural powers. He expressed his ideas in terse, pithy and pregnant sentences. Along with his preceptor or singly, he made pilgrimages to the nearer shrines and sacred places. When he proposed to go to Varanasi and Badrinath, his master would not permit him, as he was unwilling to be separated from such a brilliant intellectual pupil. Thereupon Madhva wrote his first work, a commentary on the *Bhagawad-Gita*, for the solace of the *Guru* during his prolonged absence. "It is interesting to note that the very first work is a complete index to his great mind, vast powers of criticism and noble character. Wherever he differs, he interprets the word, phrase or sentence, quotes authorities in support of them, and leaves the rest to be supplied by a comparative study with the earlier commentaries. Moreover the *Bhashya* was intended to set the preceptor a

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thinking, whom the pupil had to convert in the first instance."

The wind was already blowing in favour of *Vishistadwaita* of Ramanujacharya against *Adwaita* philosophy of Sankara. Almost the whole of south India was flooded with the new wave of *Bhakti*. *Vishnu* and *Krishna* idols got installed in many monasteries. Vasudeva's father Pandit Madhyageha Bhatta was an important follower of the latter school. He was a worshipper of *Ananteswar Narayana*. At home he would worship *Shalagram Shila*. Even from the name of his son *Vasudeva*, the father shows his leanings towards the *Bhakti* cult.

Right from his childhood young Vasudeva was inspired by his father to the spiritual path. Both the parents had influenced the child. Udupi was a centre of learning, culture and religious discourses among scholars would always take place in one house or another. Debates used to be held regularly and these would invariably be on no other subject than religious topics. Numberless mendicants would collect in the vicinity. The young Vasudeva would not leave any such discussions. He was preparing himself mentally for a bigger horizon than the sacred Udupi. The most learned and respected scholar of Udupi was Acharya Achyuta Prakash. Vasudeva had a secret desire for long to make him his preceptor. With the keen desire to accept the learned Achyutaprakasha as his preceptor, Vasudeva left for his monastery one day early in the morning. With great humility the young saint expressed his desire of meeting the Acharya. He wanted to study *Vedas*, *Vedanta* and the six Indian philosophies at his feet. Acharya Achyutaprakash knew Vasudeva's father. He received Vasudeva most cordially. He was looking at his bright eyes and beaming face showing signs of brilliance. A good teacher is always attracted by such a student.

Very affectionately the Acharya told him, "I know your father Madhyageha. He is a learned person. He is a worshipper of *Sri Vishnu*. Being his son how could you come to me? Do you not know that I am an *Adwaitavadin*? Tell me the background please."

Vasudeva told him, "I have heard from my father that although you are a follower of *Adwaita* philosophy you are

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not antagonistic to those leaning towards *Sri Vishnu*. You regularly visit *Chandramouliswar Shiva* temple and *Ananteswar Vishnu* temple. I have also heard that your Guru Prajnatirtha has great respect for the *Vishnu* worshippers although he belongs to Sankara's *Dashnami* group".

The Acharya was scanning each measured word of the brilliant youngman. He was fascinated by his demeanour and personality, the depth of knowledge as refleeted in his eyes and speech. He could realise the boy's self confidence and visualise a bright future for him. Young Vasudeva was a brilliant student. He always was admired by his teacher and colleagues for his original ideas and interpretations.

He was a good sportsman. He was respected for his boldness, sound solid health and strong determination. Once he undertook a plan he would see it to the last. He would top in any item of sports or athletics. Wrestling was his favourite. In South Karnataka there used to be regular wrestling competitions. He was extremely popular as a prince among wrestlers and it is believed that due to this reason he was fondly addressed as *Bayuputra* Bhim of the *Mahabharata* fame. The eminent scholar Narayana Bhatta, who was the son of the saint's disciple Pandit Trivikram Acharya, and biographer of the saint, refers to the saint repeatedly as incarnation of *Bayu* or *Bayuputra* in both treatises on the Master *Madhva Vijaya* and *Manimanjaree*.

Much before that the playmates and colleagues affectionately started calling him *Bhim*. Along with his body he cultivated equally strongly his intellect and deep spiritual pursuit. He would spend most of the leisure time in silent meditation. It was during this period that he picked up the skill of a brilliant debator.

Acharya Achyutaprakash said, "With the grace of Almighty you have come on earth as a genius. One day the country and the world will benefit by your wisdom. I gladly accept you as my disciple."

For Vasudeva it was an altogether a new life. One by one he studied *Nyaya*, *Sankhya*, *Vedas* and *Vedantas*. The moment Acharya Achyutaprakash raises an item on *Adwaita Vedanta*, Vasudeva will give it an interpretation in the *Bhakti* style. By

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and by the brilliance of the young student became the topic in any intellectual discussion.

The parents were proud of their son. Number of proposals came for his marriage. And one day the father clearly said that both had seen a charming bride for their only son. The son looked at his father as if he had received an electric shock.

Then humbly he said he had no intention of settling down as a householder. He had decided to embrace *sannyas* under the initiation of Acharya Achyutaprakash.

"How is that?" thundered the father, "you are our only son. If we miss you how shall we live? Why do you not understand our problem? Why do you think that the world is mere *Maya*?"

"I am not leaving the world with that idea. I did not believe that the whole world is a *maya*. I want to leave the world and devote myself to the service of *Sri Vishnu*. The Lord will look after you. I have taken a vow to preach the message of *Bhakti*, devotion to the Lord, in a scientific way.

A son's main duty in the world is to offer memorial service —*Pitri Tarpan*. Being the only son he did not like to leave for *sannyas* and promised to stay with his *Guru* till the second brother was born. Twelve years passed in *Guru's* house. Vasudeva had a brother. He too was a gifted child. His name was Vishnutirtha. After performing *Tarpan* of their parents who died after some years, he too joined the order. He became a mendicant.

One day the *Guru* called Vasudeva and handed over the charge of monastary to him. Before a learned gathering he declared that as the chief priest of the monastery he would be known henceforth as *Anandatirtha*. In all his works Madhva used this affectionate name given to him by Acharya Achyuta-prakasha.

During those days religious debates specially known as *tarka* were compulsory. Anandatirtha entered many debates but he could hardly be defeated. According to Swami Prajnananda, the period between eleventh and fourteenth centuries was a glorious period for the students of *Nyaya* and *Vedanta*. Srihansa Misra, Gangesh Upadhyaya, Chit Sukhacharya, Anandabodh Bhattarakacharya, Vallabhacharya, Vedanta Desikacharya,

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Vidyaranya Munishwar all were contributing and enriching the intellectual life of the country.

At the direction of the *Guru*, Madhvacharya made a long programme for pilgrimage and religious debates.

The Acharya was conscious of his responsibility. He knew his message was to enlighten the millions. And for that mere mission won't do. He must have mass contact. They must come forward and participate in his new movement. Luckily the routes of his country-wide long journey are available. The accounts of his discourses and debates are also recorded by the order. One of the records says:

"Madhva then undertook a tour through the country to broadcast his views. The rules of his order too forbade adopting a permanent dwelling place. It was expected that he should ever be on the move. The Guru, though old, was persuaded to start on a pilgrimage with the disciple. They set out from Udupi and journeyed by easy stages, passing through Mangalore, Vishnumangalam, Cochin and Trivandrum. At Trivandrum, we are told, Madhvacharya had a meeting with Vidya Sankara, the Head of the Sringeri Math who was camping there. The meeting was not very pleasant. There was a stormy altercation and they parted. They met again after some months at Rameswaram, where both spent the four months of the rainy season. From Rameswaram, Madhva proceeded on his journey through Pandya and Chola territories and after visiting Srirangam, Sribushnam, Chandragiri and other places, he returned to Udupi."

Madhva made extensive tours throughout India. He visited Badarikashrama twice from where he brought the images of *Digvijaya-Rama* and *Vedavyas* and wrote his commentary on *Vedantasutras* on return. He toured all over India, organised his followers and ordained a number of *Acharyas* to carry on his work after him. Back at Udupi again, he built a temple of Krishna and spent his time preaching his philosophy. His principal pupils were Padmanabhatirtha, Naraharitirtha, Madhavatirtha and Akshobhyatirtha. Of these, Naraharitirtha was sent to Jagannatha-Kshetra (Puri) in Orissa to bring the idols of Rama and Sita. Naraharitirtha became the preceptor of the Ganga King Narasimha II (A.D. 1279-1306). Thirty seven treatises are ascribed to Madhva. The most important

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among those are his commentaries on the *Brahma-Sutra*, the *Upanishads*, the *Gita*, the *Rig Veda* (first three chapters), the *Bhagavata Purana*, and short prose tracts defining and elucidating his principles and brief refutations of Adwaitic metaphysics and an epitome of the *Bharata*.

Madhva was considered by his followers as an incarnation of *Vayu*, the Wind-God. People began to join his religion in large numbers. He left a deep and abiding impression as an original interpreter of the Vedanta and resuscitator of an ancient and long-forgotten tradition of Vaishnava theistic interpretation of the *Vedanta* going back to the *Vedic* and *Upanishadic* sources.

After a long journey Acharya Madhva reached Varanasi. Here he came in contact with the principal schools of contemporary thought. His main intention was to spread the philosophy of *Dwaita* that he had already expressed in his *Geetavasya* and *Brahmasutra*.

Acharya Madhva meditated in the Vyas cave where he had a vision of the Sage Vyas who was an incarnation of *Sri Narayana*. As Vyas appeared before Sankaracharya, he did so before Acharya Madhva and told him, "I am happy with you. Your ideas have enriched the Indian philosophy. It has brought a new flood of devotion. With a special emphasis on *Bhakti* you have to write now a treatise on the Mahabharata. This will help you to establish your theory further."

There the saint received three *Shalagram Shilas* from the ancient sage, which he installed at three different places.

Madhva was overwhelmed with the blessings of Vyasadeva. This was a long desire lingering long in his heart. He had cherished for long to see the most enlightened soul among the sages who was none but *Vishnu* Himself. Madhva was in ecstasy. He fell at the feet of Vyas who blessed him in his new venture.

Madhvacharya had a galaxy of brilliant scholars and saintly loyal mendicants who were his disciples. They shadowed the Acharya and preached his teachings. Madhva was more of a missionary than anything else. Strangely enough, all the big three stalwarts of *Vedanta*, Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva religiously took up the task of preaching their views and with that end in view made long journeys, came in touch

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with people, entered into debates, got their viewpoints countered and established their own viewpoints. They were path finders and great communicators. Among the most illustrious disciples of Madhvacharya were: Padmanabha Tirtha, Jayatirtha, Satyatirtha, Pandit Trivikram Acharya and a huge team of learned dedicated mendicants whom the saint prepared himself to take the task of preaching the message of dualism—the message of love and service to man.

The disciples were thoroughly versed in the *Vedas*, *Vedantas* and particularly in *Geetabhasya*, *Brahma sutra vasya* and *Mahabharat Tatparyanirnayh* by Sri Madhva to interpret to the common lay men.

Recently in a thought provoking brief talk, Sri Viswesha Tirtha Swamiji of Sri Pejavan *Matha*, Udupi gave a brilliant analysis of the *Mahabharata* as explained by Madhva. He was comparing Madhva and his greatest disciple Jayatirtha to Bhima and Arjuna. The talk definitely throws light on the ideas of Acharya Madhva on an important epic *Mahabharata*. This is given in brief:

The contribution of the two great acharyas made in the *adhyatma ksetra* (philosophical field) is comparable to the great combined services of Bhima and Arjuna made towards the destruction of the evil *Kaurava* forces at the battle of Kurukshetra. *Dharma* was triumphant. In a similar manner in the philosophical battle of our age, Sri Madhva and Sri Jayatirtha the incarnation of Bhima and Arjuna, made equally significant contribution by their destruction of perverse knowledge (*viparita jnana*), ignorance (*Ajnana*) and atheism (*Nastikyam*). Their claim to a correct understanding and a competent interpretation of the scripture Gita cannot be questioned. The simple reason is, in their prior lives they directly listened to the Lord's discourse, Gita. Hanuman the prior incarnation of Bhima was there on the banner of Arjuna. Bhima's incarnation is Sri Madhva. Jayatirtha is the incarnation of Indra as Arjuna. They cannot have given us anything except the correct interpretation of the Gita.

Jayatirtha is a great interpreter and his exposition is unique, his style is profound. He has adopted the lecture method, summarised the rival doctrines to Madhva and

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refuted them. His contribution is extraordinary and monumental.

Unlike other acharyas Sri Madhva does not look upon the great epic *Mahabharata* as the saga of the Kauravas and the Pandavas. That is the apparent meaning. A second interpretation of the epic is that of a moral allegory. The character in the epic represent virtues—Yudhisthira *Dharma*, Bhima *Jnana* and *Vairagya*, Arjuna Valour, Nakula and Sahadeva patience and devotion. Thirdly the *itihasa* has an *adhyatmic* meaning (inner sense). It portrays the struggle in the heart of man between the evil forces and good"

There is a constant war. The human body is the Kurukshetra, the field of action. Sakuni represents the atheistic spirit, which negates God, soul, *Dharma*, *Papa*, *Punya*. It is this atheism that is at the root of all *asuric* forces, and their pressure. It is a *manava itihasa*, the struggle of Man.

The pilgrimages in earlier days were not easy ones. They were not only hazardous and tedious, every moment an unexpected danger could have finished the whole team of pilgrims. Not only the known foes like wild beasts, tigers, serpents and dacoits, the danger of natural calamity and harassment by watchmen were there.

The Acharya started his journey with his full team leaving everything in the hands of the Lord. During these journeys his disciples were fortunate to have seen and experienced many miracles. Narayan Acharya has given some of the glimpses of these miraculous events in his *Madhva Vijaya*.

Once when the team was passing through Devagiri in Maharashtra the whole team got trapped by king's men. Raja Mahadeva was just enthroned. So his exuberance to do public work and get popular was but natural. He gave an order for voluntary digging for all to complete a long canal. The young king used to supervise the work himself with his court people.

The order was placed before the public by drum beating. None could avoid the royal order. Anybody passing that way was to give a day's work as his donation. The punishment for evasion of the royal order was exemplary.

As the saint was passing that way the royal servants haulted them and ordered them to take up the work without any

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delay. The mendicants pleaded that they were mere pilgrims. They were on a long journey and they had left all worldly duties. "Not only that we are not the king's subjects, we are not bound by your royal order", said the Acharya.

The civil servants would simply not listen to them. They were insisting on their taking up digging then and there. In the melee the king appeared with his full royal caravan.

What has happened? Why this noise? Why all of you are wasting time?

The civil servants explained everything.

The king listened to them.

Now Madhva told the king, "Look here king, you are doing a good work for the benefit of the public. Your order is with the best of intentions. But it does not touch us. We have left everything in life."

The young king was over enthusiastic. He insisted that the royal order touched all irrespective of their becoming householders or monks. Why should the monks be exempted from this order? Do they not get the benefit of welfare activities?

The saint insisted that the householders and the monks had different duties. The monks had subtle duties like spiritual upliftment and raising moral values of the people.

Raja Mahadev was going to lose his temper. He was getting impatient. Why should these monks delay the day's work?

Mahadev told Madhva, "Well, monk, I do not have much time to argue with anybody. My order stands and without wasting any further time, go ahead with the work."

"All right. We are just starting our work. Before we start digging can I ask you a minor question?" asked Madhva humbly.

"Yes. What is your question?"

"Oh king, you are the lord of this area. You are the patron of all the subjects. You have taken up a new welfare project of digging the canal. Does it not need your holy touch? Can it afford to miss your royal touch? How is it that you never touched the spade or the earth?"

The king agreed, this did not strike him.

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The saint said, "Strike now. Take the spade. Dig the canal. It is not too late even now. That will inspire your subjects."

The king thought it was not a bad idea. He joined the whole team; with great enthusiasm he started digging the canal.

But what is this?

Hours have passed and there is no indication of hls stopping. The King was looking absolutely abnormal. His eyes were big and red. He was breathing unnaturally. He was digging hundreds of baskets of earth and carrying them on his head and throwing them aside. He was not at all looking tired. He had no sign to stop it either.

The royal servants had their doubts. Has the king gone mad?

The whole town came to see the fun. The queen had come from the palace. They all came to realise that the whole thing was due to the spiritual power of the saint who was standing behind.

One of the disciples of the saint told them about the great spiritual power of Madhva who was an incarnation of *Vayu*, very near to the heart of Narayana. He was angry with the king. So all these troubles. First they must apologise to him for their misdemeanour. Otherwise the king would go on digging the canal indefinitely. All the royal members fell at the saint's feet and asked for his pardon. The king became normal and was blessed by the saint who said, "Look here king, it is through meditation and spiritual work that the monks serve their society. How many are lucky to have God realisation? Only if you are good to His messengers and are nice to the monks you get His blessings. See that monks are always respected in your kingdom. Your kingdom is bound to flourish".

Soon Devagiri flourished like anything. The story of Raja Mahadeva's digging the canal got widely circulated and people came in thousands to participate in welfare activities. He became one of the most successful and popular kings of Devagiri.

In spite of all requests from the king, Acharya Madhva left Devagiri with his team.

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There are many interesting anecdotes of the life of the saint recorded by Pandit Narayan Acharya in *Manimanjari*. Once the saint entered a kingdom in the North West Frontier State ruled by Turks. The whole team was stopped at the border by the guards. The disciples gave them some gold coins and entered the kingdom.

According to tradition the saint straight went to the royal palace and presented himself before the king. Madhva never learnt Turkish language but to the surprise of all, the disciples got stunned when the Acharya fluently conversed with the king in his own language.

There was a charm of the saint. He was tall, bright, handsome and the eyes were extraordinarily bright. The ruler was fascinated by him. He repeatedly requested him to stay there for some time more with his team. But the saint left for the next place without caring for royal favour.

Once a close associate of the saint Satyatirtha was in great difficulty. When the pilgrims reached near a dense forest it was almost dark. So they decided to stop there. Satyatirtha entered the forest to get some fruits for the saint's dinner. Suddenly there was roar of a tiger. Madhva got terribly worried. With the whole team he reached the spot. From a distance they could see a huge tiger sitting ready to jump and Satyatirtha just above its head hanging himself on a branch of a tree.

The saint went straight near the tiger. His body was beaming with brightness. The tiger behaved like a pet when the Acharya patted on its back. It finally left the place.

Satyatirtha was saved. Very humbly he wanted to know how did it happen? Why did the saint risk his life?

The Acharya told him that Satyatirtha was a dedicated soul. He had served him so faithfully and assisted him in his *Geeta Vasya* and *Sutra Vasya* by copying the manuscript and he was serving him so loyally. You have to do much more in the service of Lord *Vishnu*. That is exactly what I made the tiger to understand by gesticulation and affectionate pat.

The saint did not like to emphasise on his yogic power. He was definitely performing a miracle.

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Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the great Indian philosopher, however, has his reservations about the mircales. In his *Indian Philosophy*, he records, "Narayanacharya's *Madhvavijaya* and *Manimanjari* contain the orthodox account of Madhva's life and work. If we eliminate the miracles and supernatural incidents which the piety of his followers attributed to him we may get the historical basis of Madhva's life and mission."

There is no reason to eliminate the miracles. The great scholar (who himself was kind to present all his books to the author) had no experience of miracles. Miracles do take place in the lives of spiritual path finders. In fact they themselves try to keep it a secret because this is only at the first stage of *Siddha*. Sri Ramakrishna advised his followers to avoid this. But it is not necessary to eliminate these incidents from Narayancharya's works. Madhva's constant shadow and intimate disciple will certainly not write a lie. Many modern saints are showing miracles. Unless one is present one would not like to believe. The writer has seen many such miracles including a dead man getting his life back by the illustrious saint Sitaram Omkar Nath Thakur.

Madhva's philosophy of *Vedanta* known as *Dwaita* is also known as *Tattavada*. He had been the pioneer to introduce the trial for a school of devotion to God and duty to humanity. He affirmed the faith in the scriptures and "fought tooth and nail the current philosophies of the age, scientific materialism, naturalistic atheism, monistic idealism, cheap humanism of the secular type and all forms of sensualistic hedonism and types of permissive society."

A modern philosopher, representing the institute devoted to the study and propagation of the religion, culture and philosophy of Jagadguru Sri Madhvacharya* describes the philosophy of the saint as follows:

"Madhva held the view that man is not merely an enlarged edition of the animal, nor a thinking machine but is essentially the soul, who is immortal and has a potential immutable nature. The saint builds his theory on the authority of the triple texts, the *Mula Ramayana* and the *Sattvika Puranas*, the

* Based on a personal visit by author to Madras to collect details on the saint.

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Mahabharata and the entire *Pancharatra Agamas*. "His system is essentially Vedic, philosophical categories like God, soul, heaven, hell and moral values like *dharma*, *punya*, *papa* are made known by scripture and not through perception and inference."

The Acharya places Lord *Narayana* above any other category. Madhva insists, *Narayana* is the ultimate reality. There is none superior or equal to Him.

He is not an attributeless, actionless, indeterminate Being. He is the home of infinite auspicious attributes (*anantakalyanagunaparipurna*). He has no defects whatsoever. (*Dosa varjita*) His form and personality are made up of a super *prakrita* nature (His nature does not partake of *Sattava*, *Rajas* and *Tamogunas*). There is no destruction for His body or His Super Soul, no touch of sorrow and He is the embodiment of perfection. He has no *Dehanasa*, *Svarupa nasa*, *duhkbaprapti* or *apurnata*. His personality is a unique being. There is no differenee between Him and His limbs. He can perform any act through any limb. His attributes are distinguished though they are not different from Him through the category of *Vissa*. This self differentiating category enables us to distinguish attributes, which are non-different from the object. But for it, we shall not be able to distinguish the infinite attributes of the Lord. The Lord is the only independent category. (*svatantra tattva*). All others are dependent Reals—souls and *prakrti*. Souls and *prakrti* are eternal not in their own right but due to the Lord's *sankalpa* (resolve). Independence means the Lord is not looking for any external aid in respect of His existence, knowledge and activity (*Sattapramiti pravrtti paranapeksatva*). In respect of the aforesaid functions, all other reals are dependent on the Lord. The Lord has 8 primary attributes—(1) Creation (2) Sustainment (3) Destruction (4) Control (5) Bestowing of knowledge (6) Ignorance (7) Bondage and (8) Liberation. (*Srstyadyasta karta*)

He is the prime purport of not only all the scriptures but also the prime connotation and denotation of all words and non-sensical sounds (*Dhvanyatmaka Varnatmaka sabdas*). He is the one who bestows on all the other deities beginning from Lakshmi to Agni the powers to function according to their status in the hierarchy.

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He is the bestower of *moksa* and He occupies the highest place in the hierarchy, in which Lakshmi and Vayudeva take the second and third places. He has to be worshipped as the chief of all these deities, regarding them as His retinue. The Lord is all in all in Sri Madhva's philosophy. He controls all the activities of souls and brings them into existence by giving them the appropriate bodies to work out their destiny and attain the awareness of their own potential nature, (*Svasvarupa)* Bhakti.

The followers of Acharya Madhva call themselves as *Sad Vaishnavas.*

The Acharya clearly refuses the existence of *Brahma* or Shiva as the highest deity. In the beginning there was only one God and that was *Narayana* or *Vishnu.*

Eko Narayana asit na Brahma na cha Shankara
Ananda ek ebagra asinnarayanah prabhu

The whole universe has came out of the body of *Vishnu—Vishnordehajja gat Sarbamabirasit.*

God is not a contingent but a necessity. His existence is established on the basis of revelation and not reason.

The souls are eternal, non material categories. They have no death or birth. Their association with the physical body is described as birth, dissociation is death. *Samsara* is a state of existence in which the soul is not aware of its true nature—*Swarupa*, nor can it see God. The two-fold ignorance constitutes bondage. It is real, not illusory. The two fold ignorance makes the soul identify with the body which makes it run after endless pleasures and in the pursuit, transgress *dharma.* If one wants to get rid of this one must seek the blessings of the Lord which can be earned only by "devotion of the purest type".

Acharya Madhva says, "Purity in *bhakti* means the correct knowledge that the Lord has no equals, none superior to Him, that there is no difference between His original form and incarnations, that the souls are not identical with God, that the Lord is not devoid of attributes, non-hatred of His devotees, nor of the scriptures that proclaim His greatness. The Lord must be sought as the sole refuge and from Him nothing else

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than *moksa* must be asked for. (*Ananyagatitva Ananyaprayojanatva*). For devotion to be fruitful, it must be informed by *jnana*, learnt through the scriptures taught by the gurus. After meditating on the truths of the scriptures, one must contemplate for a long time without any interruption lovingly the Lord more than one's belongings, possessions, relatives, with complete dispassion against all odds and adverse circumstances till God vision is reached. For this the prime pre-requisite is the observance of ceremonial purity and ethical excellence."

"All this has to be practised in the world of ours which is the Lord's creation. Sri Madhva asserts and affirms the absolute reality of the universe. The world is the training ground and moral theatre for the souls' *sadhana*. It is not illusory, nor indescribable, as real,or unreal."

"If the world is unreal, morality and ethical effort lose all their significance. A world denying philosophy can never be a world philosophy. Sri Madhva dialectically refutes the illusory nature of the universe and its relative reality. The doctrine of relative reality would be intelligible if the world of experience is annulled at any time. It is not so. Hence *Jagat* is *satya*."

"The souls are many in numbers and are eternal. All of them do not share the same nature. They differ in their *swarupa*. The souls that are *satvika* are destined for *moksa*. The souls that are *rajasa* dangle between earth, heaven and hell. *Tamasa* souls are destined to eternal perdition. The nature of the souls which is immutable and eternal accounts for the inequality, the mad and monstrous contrast in the lives of men. The souls are eternally and absolutely and in every way different from the Lord (*Atyantabhinna*). The souls are for ever the servants of the Lord in their very nature.

Dasabhutah sarve
hyatmanah paramatmanah

It has been truly observed by a learned philosopher, "Sri Madhva's ethical code is spelt in two words, devotion and duty. He has made devotion not a barren ritual, a special occupation employing time in a cosy corner of the house, freedom from all concerns, meditating on God for the sole purpose of individual salvation. It implies service to humanity also as a part of it.

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Nanajana Susrusa Kartavya Karavat. Service to humanity is like the tax a loyal citizen pays the government for the enjoyment of his rights. Devotion and duty are tandem expressions. One implies the other.

"As an interpreter of the scriptures Sri Madhva refutes polytheism, pan-theism and Deism. He affirms the supremacy of the Lord Narayana and regards other deities as His Parivara (retinue). Madhva Vedanta is neither wild naturalism nor crude polytheism. It is monotheism. The Lord and the world are not equated. God minus the world is not zero, but God. God is not the material cause of the world. He is the efficient cause, who impels, activates, motivates, eggs on all beings, but is not transformed into them. God is not only immanent and transcendent, but is also the continuant cause of the world. It is He who gives the glory and the unique characteristics to objects and persons that is their distinctive mark. Sri Madhva is not a Deist who makes his God create the world and leave it to its destiny. Madhva's philosophy is a glorious school of theism with a realistic metaphysic and an ontological pluralism expressing itself in a theocentric humanism. Sri Madhva accepts three instruments of knowledge and subsumes all others under it. On the practical side, 800 years ago, he installed the lovely Balakrisna Vigraha at Udupi, which was being worshipped by Rukmini at Dwaraka.

The ineffable beauty and the transcendent loveliness of this idol have been the rallying centre for the spiritual aspirants and those desirous of affluence and peace of mind down the centuries. Sri Madhva as a humanitarian fought against the killing of animals in sacrifice.

The saint's approach to philosophy is through difference and distinction and is popular as *bhedaved.* There are mainly five salient distinctions:

First, God is distinct from individual soul.

Secondly, God is distinct from nonliving matter.

Thirdly, one individual soul is distinct from every other.

Fourthly, individual souls are distinct from matter; and

Finally, in matter, when it is divided, the parts are distinct from one another.

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The universe is divided into two categories: *Swatantra*, independent being, and *Aswatantra*, dependent beings. God is the only independent being. He is the one omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent being. How God, who is distinct from individual souls and nonliving things, can be omnipresent is explained by saying that he is not limited by time and space and that the dependent beings' do not form a resisting medium to his presence.

So Acharya Madhva differs basically from Sankara's *Adwaita* and Ramanuja's *Vishistadwaita* and establishes the new school of dualism or *Dwaita* school.

During the long life of about eighty years the brilliant organiser and intellectual that he was, Madhva had established his philosophy on a firm scientific foundation. He did not encourage blind following. Each must have knowledge.

"*Pramanas*, the means and instruments of knowledge, are perception, scriptural texts, and inference. Whatever is known through these is directly related to the object of knowledge, which has a reality of its own."

The entire basis of Madhva's philosophy is the theory of knowledge. On this theory, Madhva erects his theory of the objective reality of the world. "The world is real because it is perceived as such. The objects presented to our perception may be either subject or not subject to change, and the fact that an object is fleeting and changeable does not mean that it is not real."

Madhva says,"To enable an individual to have this knowledge, *Vishnu* has made it an organism consisting of *manas*, *buddhi*, *ahankara*, five *tanmatras* (elements in their rudimentary form), five organs of knowledge (eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin), and five organs of action (speech, hand, foot, organ of excretion and organ of generation) with consciousness (*cetana*) added to the rest." In some passages Madhva calls this organism *Jiva*. To make this organism operate, *Vishnu* gives it a gross body made of five elements (*bhutas*). This is what we commonly call an individual knower. In this Madhva distinguishes three aspects—gross body, *linga* body consisting of the first eighteen items, and *svarupa* body, consciousness itself. Of them the gross body is observed to come into existence and perish; but *linga* survives death and helps the next birth.

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Process in time and space is endless, but it has a beginning in *Vishnu* in that it is the product of *Hariccha* (desire of *Vishnu*). Thus, according to Madhva, a beginningless (*anadi*) thing has its origin or beginning in *Hari* or *Vishnu*.

Madhva bases his philosophy on the principle that both the knower and the object of knowledge must be real, for otherwise no knowledge would be possible. Knowledge necessarily implies them. All knowledge is relative. Absolute knowledge or the transcendental consciousness, in which all distinction between knowledge, knower, and known vanishes —as absolute knowledge is defined in *Yoga* and by Sankara— cannot be admitted. 'No knowledge can be known', says Madhva, 'without the knower and the known'.

According to Madhva:

"The ideas 'Knowledge is *yathartha* (true)' and 'Knowledge is not objectless' are the expressions of the same truth. The fact that knowledge is occasionally wrong does not affect this truth. The percipient has a defective eye. His eye is in contact with a shell. Owing to some defect it does not apprehened the shell but only as 'This shining thing'. As the thing is not apprehended as a shell, the perception of shining kindles the impression (*samskara*) of another shining thing, silver. This impression operates on the whole of the circumstances. There is consequently the illusion, 'This is silver'."

Says the saint, "Whether the world is, in some circumstances or other, recognized to be real, unreal, relative, dependent, independent, eternal, absolute, it is essentially *paratantra*, dependent i.e. it has only a derived reality, and its source is *Brahman*. It is the realization of this idea that brings about release from bondage. For it is this realization that makes one free from illusions. *Brahman*, the source of all, has essence, objectivity, and function. With reference to every aspect it is independent. Madhva calls the non-confusion or discrimination between the dependent and the independent *bheda* (difference). The dependent is the world. The independent is *Brahman*. This is the significance of his doctrine of *bheda* (*Bhedavada*). He says '*Tasya bhedasca sarvatah adosatvasya siddhyartham*' (It is held that *Brahman* is distinct from everything else in order to maintain that It is defectless)."

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"Madhva shows that of *bheda* and *abheda*, to concentrate on either alone is the cause of *bandha* (misery). To concentrate on either *bheda* or *abheda* alone is to negate *Brahman*, the all doer and the independent. To hold that *sarvottama* and the world are different, taking difference in the ordinary general *darsana* (philosophic) sense as, for example, between a jar and a car, is to hold that the world is independent of *sarvottama*. Again, that which is not different from *sarvottama* and is affirmed to be *sarvottama* itself is in a logical sense dependent of *sarvottama*. If *sarvottama* is the principle of the world, if it is the source of the very reality of the world, and for this reason it is *svatantra* (independent) and the world *paratantra* (dependent), then how can the world be not different from it?"

The centre of his religion is *bhakti* to Krishna as taught in the *Bhagavata*, Radha having no place in it; but all other *avataras* are revered. He was bitterly against Sankara's theory of *Maya*. He found support for his teachings mainly from the *Sruti*, *Smriti*, *puranas* and other later literature.

As it is well known the Vedas are divided into something like the Old Testament and the New Testament, *sruti* and the *smriti*. The *sruti* is spoken by God Himself, and the *smriti* is spoken by devotees about devotees, of mentioning the descriptions of their devotion to the Supreme Lord. A great devotee can read bhakti and see that Sri Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead in both old and new sections of the *Vedas*, the *sruti* and the *smriti*, and the ultimate conclusion is in the *Bhagvadgeeta* where Sri Krishna says *vedais ca sarvair aham eva vedyo vedanta krt veda-vid eva caham*. "I am seated in everyone's heart".

God resides in human heart. That was also realised by Acharya Ramanuja.

Acharya Madhva did not hesitate to disown *Mayavad* or the Adwaita philosophy of Sankara by declaring it as promoter of atheism. In his *Mayavadi Satadusini*, "The hundred defects of the Mayavada philosophy", he strongly condemned the *Mayavadis*, and defeated thousands of atheists who ultimately joined his group to worship *Vishnu*.

The Acharya insisted that the ultimate goal of Vedic knowledge was vision of *Vishnu*.

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"While God is one and all pervading, He still has unlimited qualities and energies. How can the Lord be less than His creation?" "If you and I are God, then how did God fall into ignorance? Is ignorance, an illusion, more powerful than God?" "The example of a drop merging into the ocean is misleading. The soul never is described by the Vedas as a liquid, but as a spark of life. A better example is this: As a green bird seems to disappear into a green forest, similarly a spark seems to merge into the light of God. However a bird remains an individual bird and joins other birds of varieties of shapes and forms, as well as animals of varieties of shapes of forms within the forest. One who sees deeply into the forest knows this. Similarly, one who knows God deeply knows that the soul joins the brilliant souls and the Lord Himself in *Vaikuntha*, which is full of attributes that make this world seem like a shadow".

Perhaps the most philosophical and analytical refutation of the impersonal Sankarite school was presented by the great, giant scholar, Sri Madhvacharya. He was the incarnation of two warrior devotees, Hanuman and Bhima combined, and he battled the cult of illusion like a lion. "To say that the world is false is a self-contradictory statement. Who just said the world is false? Your own tongue defeats the idea." "You therefore say that, that which has form is illusion and Krishna has form, and is therefore illusion. No devotee of the Vedas can tolerate this".

"The example of the rope and the snake is absurd. A man thinks a rope is a snake because he has already seen a real snake. When he comes to such knowledge, the rope does not disappear or the man disappear, only the wrong idea of a snake is gone. Similarly, we take this world to be real and love this world in illusory consciousness, but there is a real world that we have vague experience of in our heart, and the reality is Krishnaloka, Vaikuntha. Krishna's form is eternal, reality, absolute." "If there is a reflection of someone in the water, do I turn to the reality and find a blank space? Similarly, this material world is the reflection of the supreme world, as described in the Vedas. So this world has form and colour, so the supreme world, which is the reality of the reflection, of the shadow, will also have the shapes, forms,

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plus much more." "Nothing can exist without form". "If you want to speak about impersonal, then go write your own book. As far as I see, it is Vishnu and devotion to Vishnu that is sung in the beginning, middle and end of all Vedas. The only place your school of illusion can stand is in the space between the horns of a rabbit." "It is only the atheistic Buddhism disguised as Vedanta, and most dangerously so. It is the most pathological, diabolical way to promote atheism in the disguise of a Vedic scholar. Most dangerous."

It will be useful and interesting to note the main differences in approach to *Vedanta* by Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva.

Dr. Radhakrishnan compares Ramanuja and Madhva in his *Indian Philosophy*. He observes, "The main differences are that while Ramanuja thinks that the individual souls are similar in their natural essence, Madhva makes them different. Madhva denies that Brahman is the material cause, which Ramanuja admits. For Madhva, the universe is not the body of God. In Ramanuja there are no souls disqualified for salvation and there are no differences in the enjoyment of bliss for freed soul."

Madhvacharya and Sankaracharya had basic differences in their approaches. These two stalwarts showed two different paths to God-realisation and although Sankara is considered the Father of Indian philosophy and is always remembered as the first Yogi, whenever there is any discussion on *Vedanta*, Madhva too has an equally important place. The main points of difference have been brilliantly brought in nutshell by an eminent scholar as:

"Sankara had taught that *Brahman* is *nirguna* (attributeless) and that *Maya* (nescience), as superimposed on *Brahman*, is the origin of the world. Madhva thought that this position was dualistic. Ramanuja had taught that *Brahman* as *suksma-cidacid-visista* (having subtle consciousness and materiality as attributes) is the origin of the universe as it is experienced (*vyakta*). Madhva pointed out that so long as there is insistence on this *visista* character of *Brahman*, oneness of the ground is not attained and there still persists the question about the author of the *vissita* character of *Brahman*. Madhva showed that Brahman is that which is the complete and independent ground of all that is other than *Brahman*. To expound this

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truth, Madhva wrote four *Bhasyas*: (i) on the *Brahma-Sutra*, (ii) on the opening passages of the *Rig-Veda*, (iii) on the ten philosophical *Upanishads* and (iv) on the *Bhagavad Gita*. He also wrote expositions of the *Mahabharata*, ten treatises bearing on the inquiry into *Brahman*, and several other works in order to indicate that it is possible to make the whole life of man an expression of inquiry into *Brahman* (*Brahma-jijnasa*). In all, Madhava wrote thirty seven works.

"Madhva's works exhibit a thorough unity of purpose. Each work served as an interpretation of the others, so that all his works are finally different chapters or sections of a single work. This idea seems to have been fully recognized by his immediate followers who collected his works under a single title *Sarvamula*. Jaya Tirtha, the greatest of Madhva's commentators, at the opening of *Tattvaprakasika* defines the character of his commentary as *sangamyante guroh girali* (the teacher's statements are brought together)".

The Almighty *Vishnu* is the *Sarvottama*, the greatest of all. Everything is being done only at His will. The saint defines *sarvottama* as '*Ekah sarvottamo jneyah eka eva karoti yat*'. The Supreme is to be known as the independent doer (and independent maker of the doer), because it does and makes others do without depending upon anything else. The whole expression stands for the idea that the creative activity of the Supreme presupposes or aims at absolutely nothing except itself. His other expressions for the same idea are *para*, *parama*, etc.

The most poignant point in the teaching of the Master is that every bit of activity in the universe is being done by the will of God. Madhva says, "To think that an individual is the doer is to arrest activity. It is misery (*bandha*). Moral or religious teaching made on this basis, i.e. on the basis of individual doership, does not help the individual because the whole thing ends in making the illusion of individual doership more and more confirmed and consequently *bandha* more and more intense."

Moral activity or *Karma* leads to knowledge. Madhva observes that "*Karma* is the result of knowledge. It is the spontaneous expression of knowledge. He means by knowledge

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the appreciation of the truth that *Brahman* is all-doer. Without this appreciation no *karma*, no moral activity, is worth recognizing. For without knowledge *karma* is the result of illusion of individual doership. The so-called *karma* of this kind is a case of *ahankara* and *mamakara*. It is the negation of Brahman, the all-doer''.

According to Madhva, "The realization of the absence of individual doership is the origin of all discipline that is really spiritual. This realization is, in other words, the recognition of the all-doership of Brahman. He means by all-doership (*sarvakartrtva*) the state of doing all of all. This means that there is nothing in the world that subsists or endures by its own merit. In this sense he defines the world as *Paratantra* (dependent) and *Brahman* as *svatantra* (independent), *Svatantra* is is the self-established. That it is self-established implies that it is *gunapurna*, that in which every property is complete in the sense that it is never exhausted, never modified, even though it is the source of the same property that forms an aspect of the world. Some hold that it is attributeless (*Sankara* and his followers). Against these positions Madhva shows that *Brahman* as incomplete pre-supposes *Brahman* as complete as its author, similarly *Brahman* as attributeless presupposes *Brahman* with attributes as its author. The incomplete has its origin in the complete; and the negative has its origin in the positive. Further, 'attributelessness' is unintelligible, as, in the absence of other attributes, attributelessness itself serves as an attribute. The *Sruti* defines *Brahman* as *Visnu*. *Visnu* in the *Vedic* sense is the creative principle. In recognition of this truth Madhva gives a ruling '*Brahmasabdasca Visnaveva*' (the word *Brahman* in the *Sruti* is used only in the sense of *Visnu*)."

In short the entire philosophy of Madhva may be summed up as below:

"First, matter is distinct from God and human souls and in itself is only a dependent being." Secondly "God is the ruler of the universe but the universe is real and eternally existent."

"Each soul is distinct from every other, and all souls are distinct from God, though they have dependent existence in him. By nature souls are intelligent. Each soul when born into this world and invested with body and senses is in a state

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of bondage, but by continued struggle through many lives release from this bondage may be obtained.

"Moreover, although souls are distinct from one another, they fall into classes. Of these there are three, differing in their essential nature as well as in their destiny. One class, who are moral and devoted to God alone, will attain salvation and enjoy the eternal felicity of heaven—an abode called Vaikuntha. The second class will never attain salvation but will remain subject to rebirth, experiencing in life after life both happiness and misery. The third class, who revile Visnu and his devotees, will never attain salvation but will be subject to damnation."

According to Swami Prabhavananda, "This belief of Madhva that only a few attain salvation while the rest cannot, and some even suffer damnation, is contrary to the teachings of all other Indian religious schools. Madhva may possibly have been influenced by certain Christian missionaries who during his time may have penetrated into India.

"Only such souls as are devoted to *Vishnu* will attain salvation that is go to *Vaikuntha* and enjoy the beloved company of God but even in Vaikuntha there are gradations of souls and therefore differences between them."

Madhva had crystallised the wisdom of scriptural texts into an outstanding systematic philosophy. His brilliant preachings were noted for their austere intellectualism and philosophic penetration. Once he went to Udupi for a dip in the sea. He saw a ship coming from Dwaraka to Udupi. The ship was about to get sunk. Madhva noticed that the merchant and the ship were in distress. He was overcome with pity and took out his upper garment and waved it towards the ship and the ship safely arrived at the beach. The merchant's joy knew no bounds. He prostrated before the young *sannyasin,* offered his services and sought his blessings. Pleased with his sincerity, Madhva invoked long life and prosperity for the merchant and asked for a piece of *Gopichandan* from the ship. The merchant readily gave it. Madhva broke open that piece and to his surprise he saw a beautiful image of *Lord Krishna,* which he installed in Udupi on the bank of the *Sarowar* formed out of his tears of joy. It is known as the "Madhva Sarowar".

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It seems except Madhva, no saint of importance has spoken of infinite stay in hell. People think that it might be the influence of the saint's contact with Christians. Kalyanpur in South India was a colony of Christians. Even in the sixth century A.D. foreign travellers like Cosmas found Christians on these spots. This Kalyanpur was near the birthplace of the saint Pajka which was on a sea shore. There is no wonder if the saint mixed with these children of God and got influenced by the message of the Holy Christ.

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's opinion on this point however is different. He writes, "Madhva stands out for unqualified dualism and insists on the five great distinctions of God and individual soul, God and matter, the individual soul and matter, one soul and another and one part of matter and another. The doctrines of exclusive mediatorship through *Vayu*, the son of *Vishnu*, eternal hell as well as the missionary fervour of Madhva's faith, suggest the influence of Christianity, though there is little evidence in support of it. In view of the fact that Madhva's commentary on the *Kena Upanishads* is taken from *Brahma Sara*, it is reasonable to think that there was the tradition of dualism even prior to Madhva."

(Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, page 738)

Some scholars claim that Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya's Gaudiya Vaishnavism owes its origin to the influence of Acharya Madhva. Even recently a learned professor wrote that Chaitanya was influenced by Madhva. There is no truth in it. On the contrary according to details available the followers of Sri Chaitanya only refuted the theories of Madhvacharya. In a reference in *Gaudiya Ganoddes Deepika* on *Guru Parampara*, Baldeo Vidyabhusan refers to *Madhva muth*. This saint in his earlier life belonged to *Madhva muth*, later on he became a disciple of Radha Damodar Das of the *Gaudiya* school. He could not brush aside the influence of his first institution, when the *Gaudiya* scholar was faced with bitter criticism at Jaipur. To the question why the *Gaudiya Vaishnavas* do not have their original *Vedanta bhasya*, Baldeo had to take the shelter of Madhva school. Otherwise there is no reason to think that Mahaprabhu belonged to Madhvacharya group. He had his own version of *Vaishnavism*

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based on love and humility. On the contrary there are records which mention that Mahaprabhu had great respect for Ramanujacharya whose place of worship he visited as a holy pilgrimage. All great saints have their original paths of enlightenment. Such controversies are redundant.

The Cultural Heritage of India (Volume IV) pays glowing tribute to the saint and records: "His chief contribution to Indian culture, and, in fact, to world culture, consists in the following. He showed that philosophy is the only kind of spiritual discipline. He found out that the *Sruti* is not a mere verbal testimony but the expression of pure philosophy. He discovered that *Brahma mimamsa* is the highest form of philosophical thinking. He found out that the real cause of *bandha* (bondage) is superimposition of doership on the individual selves. He realised that man is really a doer only when he understands that he is *paratantra*. He saw that the only way of appreciating the highest truth as the only truth is the recognition of the reality and actuality of the world in a healthy sense. He showed that the highest truth must necessarily be absolutely complete with reference to every aspect of it (*gunapurna*), free from every kind of dependence (*nirdosa*), the real object in every object (*jneya*) the goal of every endeavour (*gamya*) and the source of knowledge as such (*guru*). For this reason he calls this truth Narayana; and he makes it clear that that an individual can have peace only when he has realised this truth."

The easiest way of serving *Sri Vishnu* according to Acharya Madhva is to follow the three methods.

First : *ankan* or marks of *Sri Vishnu's* signs of *Sankha Chakra* on the body

Second: *namakaran* or naming children and members of the family in the name of *Sri Vishnu.*

Third : *Bhajan, kayik, bachik* and *manasik* to sing to the glory of Vishnu, to talk about Him and think about Him.

There is no doubt that the Acharya had built many *muths* and installed the deity of *Sri Krishna* at Udupi and other places but there is no authentic proof to say that *Sri Krishna*

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was his *istadevata* or the deity. There is no record also to support the idea that he devoted Himself to *bhajans* unlike other *Vaishnava* saints. This is being recorded on the basis of research on the Master.

The Indian philosophy has been enriched by the great contribution of the saint. His place in the history of Indian culture and thought is ever high.

Acharya Madhvacharya is one of the greatest Indian thinkers who "revitalised the Indian philosophy and revolutionised the whole gamut of Indian beliefs". He has, indeed a high place among the Indian philosophers and thinkers and the School of *Dwaita Darshan* which he was responsible for founding is a conspicuous addition to the Systems of Thought incorporated in Indian philosophy". There are eight *Maths* of this sect in India. The philosophy of Madhva has exercised a potent influence in shaping the course of religious and philosophical development of a large part of India. Some of the saints of its calendar, like Vyasaraya, Purandaradasa, Kanakadasa, Vadiraja, Vijayindra, Raghuttama, Raghavendra, Sripadaraya, Jagannathadasa and Sumatindra have exercised a powerful social and religious influence on contemporary society and thought. Madhva's philosophy is a worthy contribution of Karnataka to the body-politic of Indian thought.

Madhva set about in earnest preaching his philosophy and converting people to join his fold. He exhorted them to renounce Adwaita and to banish the delusion that man is or can be God. He asked, 'How can light be identified with darkness, truth with delusion, knowledge with ignorance, the finite with the infinite, bliss with pain, absolute perfection with imperfection?" He taught Bhakti and whole-hearted self-surrender to God.

Everything depends upon the will of God. Without His desire nothing can move an inch. In modern times Sri Ramakrishna said the same sentence, "Without His wish even a leaf cannot move."

Nityo nityanam cetanas cetananam eko bahunam yo vidadhati kaman from the original four Vedas, the sruti text, convinces us of our tiny position. We have qualities equal to God in consciousness and eternity, but we also have qualities which are very very different. This expression

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nityo nityanam is very analytically described by Sri Madhvacharya. *Nitya* means one eternal, and *nityanam* means many eternals. Now Madhvacharya says one thing cannot be more eternal than another, so if one is singled out as one eternal as opposed to some other eternals, it means there must be other qualities aside from eternality which that one has, and the others don't have. This gives us the distinction that God is more than we can ever or ever will be. That is from the Sruti. And it is confirmed again in a passage from the Smriti, *mamaivamsa jiva loke jiva bhutassanatanah*. The jivas are eternal particles and they are eternal, and they belong to Me, they are subordinate to Me, *Mayadhaksena prakrtih suyate sa caraearam*, everything moving, the living entities, and non-moving the material energy, is subordinate to Me and working under my supervision. The general conclusion is that by devotion to the supreme controller of both living and non-living, one can get into his original position enjoying with Him. *Daivi hyesa gunamayi mama maya duratyaya; mam eva ye prapadyante mayam etam taranti te.* "By surrendering to Me, one gets over the entanglement of material illusion."

The vision of the great master on God-realisation has been brilliantly summed up by the learned scholar, Dr. Radhakrishnan. He says, "The famous passage that *Brahman* is one only without a second (*ekam evadvitiyam brahma*) means that *Brahman* is unsurpassed in excellence and without an equal, since it penetrates everywhere. The attributes of God are absolute in their character and so do not limit him. *Brahman* possesses every kind of perfection. He is identified with *Vishnu* and is said to direct by his will the world and all that is in it as an absolute ruler. He creates and destroys the world again and again. He is endowed with a supernatural body and is regarded as transcendent to the world as well as immanent, since he is the inner ruler (*antaryamin*) of all souls. He manifests Himself in various forms (i.e. appears periodically in incarnations (*avataras*), and is said to be mystically present in the sacred images. He creates, maintains and destroys the universe, imparts knowledge, manifests himself in several ways, condemns some and redeems others. By his side is *Lakshmi*, capable of assuming various forms, but without a

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material body, coeternal with Him and all-pervading. She witnesses the glory of God through eternity. Unlike the Gods and Goddesses, who acquire release after many existences, *Lakshmi* is eternally redeemed (*nityamukta*). *Lakshmi* is the personification of God's creative energy. She is intelligent *Prakriti*, though God is greater than she in point of subtlety and the extent of qualities. God rules the souls and matter."

(*Indian Philosophy*, Vol.II page 742)

Madhva emphatically says, "The very existence of *Karma* and other things depends on the Lord." Acharya Madhva gradually got himself deeply absorbed in deep meditation. He would spend all his time in worshipping *Sri Vishnu*. He would be absorbing himself in divine thoughts. The saint had a vision. The child Krishna was standing before him. Balagopal as he is worshipped in temples—in *batsalya bhava*. The tribute is in the filial style.

The young Krishna was smiling. Acharya Madhva was excited: He was in ecstasy.

You have built many temples and monasteries, I am yet to be installed. I am coming soon. You will receive my idol. I shall be in a ship coming from Dwarka. Let me see what you do about me.

The figure vanished,

The saint was overwhelmed. He was getting ready for the day. He knew every bit of it was going to happen. Intuitions are true even scientifically. There is no reason to question it as a miracle as raised by the learned philosopher Dr. Radhakrishnan.

The saint was having a stroll after a sea bath along with his disciples at the sea beach at Malapi. The disciples had just left him alone for meditation. It was dawn. The sun was yet to spread its vermillion both on the sky and the sea—both endless, limitless, eternal, *ashim*, *anadi*, *ananta*. Both have the Krishna touch, the same colour *navina jaladhara shyama*. The vermillion sun rays were to sprinkle *Kumkum* on the great sky. The saint was lost in his thoughts.

Suddenly there were shouts of danger. A ship got stuck up by some hidden rock. The ship was sinking.

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Save us ! We are going to be killed by the waves in moments. Save us!

The saint saw the ship.

He raised his *angavastram*, the upper garment of a monk and asked the captain of the ship to follow the signs of its movement. Follow that route. You are saved.

By his *yogic* power he came to know the situation of the rock and directed the captain to avoid it accordingly.

The captain reached the shore and fell at the feet of the saint. "Sir, you are my saviour. I am at your service. Order me what I can offer you. I am just returning from Dwarka where I disposed of my merchandise. I am now returning home. I have made good profit. I must offer you some gold and money which you may kindly utilise in good cause. You may build a temple or do any thing you like. This is my earnest desire. Please do not disappoint me."

The saint smiled. What shall I do with gold ? What shall I do with money ? I have left them long back. I was waiting for you since dawn. I knew you would be coming. I knew what you were carrying for me.

Open the deck and bring my present.

The captain was sad. He had nothing in the deck except some bricks and earth pieces. After selling the whole merchandise, he got the deck filled with those heavy things to keep the balance in order. I got them collected at *Gopi sarovar*. *Gopi* lake. This soil is popular and sacred as *Gopichandan*.

The saint smiled. Yes. I know. I am waiting for it.

The captain was surprised. He wanted to offer something more precious than *Gopichandan*.

Bring the biggest piece of *Gopichandan*. I will show you the hidden treasure.

The captain was in suspense. He brought the biggest piece.

The saint cleaned the stone, a magnificent child *Krishna* figure came out of it. He called the disciples and showed them the deity.

The Balagopal was having the stick of churning curd in the right hand, the left hand was holding the chord used for churning.

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The disciples were excited. For the last few days they saw the *Guru* in silent mood. He was lost in his thoughts and they did not know the reason of his absentmindedness. Now the whole thing was clear. After all they too were close associates and intimate disciples of the saint. They knew the significance and meaning of each step of their preceptor. They were anticipating such an event.

The whole team came to Udupi with the idol. It was given a sacred bath. It was installed in a newly built temple.

The lake in which the idol was bathed is known still as *Madhva Sarovar*, Madhva lake, since it had tears of joy of the saint mingled in its holy water. This was the most important event in the life of the saint.

Gradually the saint was withdrawing even from sermons. He selected Padmanabhatirtha as his successor. The senior eight disciples took charge of the trust of the *Math*. All these enlightened eight saints had set up eight *Krishna* temples after the saint's demise. All these eight temples had set up two sub-centres each to propagate the message of the Master and worship *Krishna*. The headquarters of the Math is known as *Madhva Math* at Udupi. It is the *Uttaradi Math*.

In 1278 AD, on a *Shukla navami tithi*, this great born preceptor breathed his last while taking a class on *Upanishads* at Saridantar.

The undying spirit of Indian culture lost one of the brightest gems. The flower is gone, the fragrance is still there.

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JAYADEVA

(*Circa*—1200 AD)

Wherever *Gita Govinda* is recited *Sri Radhakrishna* appear to listen to it. The Lord Himself came and corrected the manuscript when the author was worrying himself over the problem whom to show higher, *Sri Radha* or *Sri Krishna*?

Sri Krishna was so much charmed by the devotion of the saint-poet that he constantly shadowed him. The Lord at Puri had in a vision directed the Raja to get certain portion of the divine song to be recited every evening before the prayer service was over.

The Saint Poet Jayadeva of Kendubilwa was an incarnation of *Bhakti*. He preferred to be poor although he used to guide the feudal lords of the locality. The Rajas would visit him at his dwelling place and would ask him about his needs. He would only tell them about his compositions. They pleaded ignorance on that art. They sometimes insisted on financial assistance which the Saint politely refused. He would like to depend hundred percent on Lord Krishna.

There is no *Vaishnava* in the world who has not heard the brilliant lyrical lines from *Gita Govinda* by Jayadeva. There was not a day when Lord Chaitanya would not listen to *Gita Govinda* before retiring. The great lyrical composition with a lilting rythm all along touches the mind immediately and the charm of the description of the *Radha-Krishna* episode keeps the reader under a spell. He is simply lost in it. "Lord Chaitanya cherished it as the very breath of his life and would not pass a day without hearing its recital. In North India amongst the saints as well as litterateurs it is held in very high esteem. Of course the theme is drawn from the *Bhagwat* and the *Garga Samhita*, the great works on *Vaishnavism*. But it has the stamp of personal experience. Sri Jayadeva had himself witnessed the Divine *Lila* he has sung. Many Sanskrit commentators have written elaborately on it discussing

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the various stages of Love through which the devotee has to pass in his pursuit of the path and which are detailed in the great work".

It is said that the sweetness of the song attracted Lord Jagannath of Puri to disappear from the holy temple to listen to the melody of the song. A *malini* was once reciting Jayadeva's famous lines :

Rati sukha sarey gatamabhi sarey
Madana manohara vesam
Na kuru nitambini gamana bilamban
Manusartam hridayesam
Dhira samirey yamuna tirey
Vasati baney Banamali
Gopi pin payodhara murdana
Chanchala kara yuga sali

"Oh Radha dear, by the side of the blue Yamuna *Krishna* once again waits to enjoy Thy kiss, the same one that taught him the lesson of the highest love. He waits to slake his soul's thirst. Oh dear, draw nearer to him on whose lips is Radha's name, in whose heart is Radha's love. Make His cheerless melancholy heart bud to blossom in the fragrant draught of love. Pray tarry no longer." Jayadeva was one of the first saints to propagate the *Radha cult* which is not mentioned even in *Bhagavata Purana*. Even the authors of *the Cultural Heritage of India* are not sure of the date of introduction of the *Radha cult*. They refer to Jayadeva as the first saint to worship *Radha-Krishna* popularising the *Radha cult* in his immortal *Gita Govinda*. It records, "it is difficult to say when this *Radha cult* actually came into being. It was a well known thing in Bengal by the time of Jayadeva, the Bengali poet, who composed his immortal *Gita-Govinda* in the Court of Laksmana Sen during the last quarter of the twelfth century AD." *Radha* is shown more important at a place where the saint is said to have his reservation. But it seems the Lord Himself came and completed the sentence in the absence of the poet. His hesitation and all doubts were obviously cleared by the Almighty *Sri Krishna* Himself. This is universally known that when the saint used to compose the *Gita Govinda*,

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he used to feel the presence of the Lord. He used to have many visions of *Sri Krishna*. The popular legend is that *Sri Krishna* used to listen to the saint's recitation of *Gita Govinda* regularly. In one particular case the saint stopped his pen when he felt perhaps he was going to cross the limit. He was giving too much importance to *Sri Radha*. The immortal line corrected by divine hand was "*Smara garala Khandanam mama sirasi mandanam dehi pada pallavam udaram; Jwalati mayi daruna madan kadananalo harat tad uphit vikaram.*"

"O Radhe! Cupid's arrow has entered my heart, and at this time you are angry with me, so I am in great distress. I bend my head, bow before you and entreat you to be reconciled and place your feet on my head so that I may be saved from the arrogance of the God of Love." Immediately the saint checked his pen—"How is it"? Can she be ever superior to Lord Krishna?" He had his genuine doubts. This is recorded vividly by another saint :

"Simultaneously came the thought in his mind, 'How can I write thus about my Lord? He stopped and went to take his bath. In the meantime the Lord appeared as Jayadeva and completed the lines even accepting some food from the hands of his wife. This is not unusual with the Lord-who is reputed for his love towards the devotees; as he Himself says :

Samoham sarvabhutesu na me dvesho 'sti na priyah
Ye bhajanti to mam bhaktya mayi te tesu chapyaham"

The Lord is equal to all but He is more kind to His devotees. He is at the beck and call of those who unreservedly surrender themselves to the Almighty.

In the *Bhagavat, Sri Krishna* repeatedly said *Aham bhakta paradhina,* I am subservient to the will of the devotees.

Sri Krishna, like an affectionate mother who has to listen to all her children takes care of the entire family individually, corroborates this point in His message:

Aham bhakta paradhino hiswatantraiva dwij
Sadha bhirgrast hrdyo bhakter bhakt jan priya
Sadhurvo hridayam mahyam sadhunam hridayam tvaham
Madanyate na jananti nohem tebhyo managapi.

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I am subservient to the will of the devotees and not free as you may think. I am bound by the bonds of their love. They hold Me their Beloved, a prisoner in their heart. I dwell in the heart of the devotees and they dwell in Mine. They love Me so much that they know none besides Me and I reciprocate their sentiment inasmuch as I know none besides them. "It is this nature and attribute of the Lord known to the saints all over the world that has made them forsake all to embrace Him."

The Almighty constantly shadows all, protects all, even those who do not care for him. But He is particularly, prisoner of a person who constantly only thinks of Him. The fun of it is, once a person gets the touchstone, once a person has enlightenment—His vision, he would simply lose all other attachments. He will have no other interests in life. He will have no other charm including in himself. At this stage the devotee becomes as simple as a child, as pure as an unsmelt rose, as sweet as jasmine. The Almighty has to take his charge, otherwise the environment and surroundings simply finish the person. They cannot stand a noble person without reservation, they are not used to do so. Only a supernatural power is transmitted through the saint and through such a noble soul society hears divine message.

When Jayadeva first described *Sri Radha* as a devotee at whose feet the Lord is stooping to ask for Her divine love, it was a challenge to the traditional thinkers and followers of *Krishna*. "How could it be? Is there any religious sanction for such description?" Jayadeva did not care for any such criticism. He knew what he was writing.

According to Nimbarka, *Sri Radha* "was the eternal consort of *Vishnu* and was incarnated like Him in *Brindavana*. There is also a suggestion, though not a clear statement, that She became the wife of Her Lord. A further progress of the *Radha cult* is found in Jayadeva's *Gita-Govinda*, where *Radha* is the mistress and not the wife of *Krishna*." (*Cultural Heritage of India, Vol IV, p—55*), whereas the new cult in its degenarated form "countenanced antinomian practices, and made *Vaishnavism* a byword of reproach."

In north India the *Radha cult* was very popular. No such 'degeneration' took place mainly because of the tender teach-

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ings of the great saint Mahaprabhu Srikrishna Chaitanya. It is well recorded that "Bengal *Vaishnavism* was saved from this degradation by the famous Chaitanya or Sri Gauranga (A.D. 1485-1533), a contemporary of Vallabha. The elements of *Radha* and *Krishna* had taken deep root in its soil as the songs of Jayadeva (Twelfth Century AD) clearly show. But the merit of Chaitanya lies in the fact that he elevated the passions of the couple to a high spiritual plane and stressed the emotion at the cost of the ceremonial side of religion."

In *Gita-Govinda* the saint poet goes to the extent of describing his beloved Lord even as a "culprit". He even "seeks amend". Who else could write it but Jayadeva?

"Gone : Lost—because I was beguiled by my heart to seek joy elsewhere: How you are suffering! Faint! Despairing! Lonely Radha! How dare I, a culprit now, approach Thee and seek amends.

I wronged Thee, Darling, and tested Thy patience too far; I have vexed Thee. My life in love, in a perpetual dance amongst cymbals, chiming *vinas*, singing new songs is now turned into a dream. The fault is Mine, I have destroyed what was real joy to Me.

I hear the woods echo with Thy sighs, sob with Thy tears, and heave with Thy bosom.

I feel shame over these wasted hours passed in separation from Thee! Ah : I have wronged the pride of curved brow, soiled the lustre of Thy bright forehead and vexed the gleam of Thy eyes!

Ah ! if I could reach Thee with soft steps, stealthily gliding over the velvety green carpets all round, to pray for forgiveness!

I that forsook Thee am condemned, I pine—succour me, ah, succour me, dear *Radha*."

This was a new side of a devotee. Jayadeva shows with his powerful pen and through absolutely self-enlightened knowledge, how a devotee also can take an upper hand. Himself a dedicated devotee—who left everything in the name of the Lord, who kicked even royal favour,—being a court-poet and the topmost one—he preferred starvation. He depended only on *Krishna*. *Krishna* finally also took his entire

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charge and he had no difficulty in his life. He and only he could take an altogether different view of a devotee's power, his relation with the Lord and Lord's relation with such a devotee. This is only a devotee and devoted relationship. Nothing beyond that.

Third parties are introduced. Both are sad—The devotee and the devoted. The followers cannot stand this melancholy scene. They intervene. The *gopis* say:

"Radha! thou art sick in love ! Krishna is pining, Moonlight turns pale; the breeze sighs : Forsake this lament; Forgive the great sin of separation: lotus of our heart; repair to the Lord and console thereby thyself and satisfy Him."

The saint tell the Lord "Thou art my all, Thou art my ornaments, Thou art my life, Thou art my jewell, *Twamasi mama bhusanang, twamasi mama Jibanam, Twamasi mama jaladhi ratnam.*

The saint-poet does not neglect his illustrious consort Padma. Her name is mentioned alongwith his at the end of the song.

The Saint-poet sings.

Smara garala khandanam mama sirasimandanang
Dehi pada pallabamudaram
Jwalati mayee daruno madana kadananalo
Haratu tadupahita bikaram
Iti chatula chatu potu charu muraboirino
Radhikamadhibachana jatam
Jayati Padmavati Ramana Jayadeva Kabi
Bharati bhanitamati shatam

"*Krishna*! if Thou cometh not these dark eye-lids will droop like a lotus leaf in the rain storm.

Ah. I have repared the couch of jasmine flowers for Thee—silvery white—made soft and fragrant, aye, fresh with my tears.

Ah ! with my lotus eyes I have searched and examined softness of the pillows—lest they prick Thy cosy body !

Krishna ! I sigh, I bury my head in the pillows. But whom shall I see, if my eyes cannot greet Thee?

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Krishna ! great is my loss
If with a kiss you do not reward me;
Sighing and suffering I pass my nights—joyless and dreary.
Krishna ! hast Thou forsaken me, forgotten and not forgiven me—then why tarry long?"

Stana binihitamapi haramudaram
Sa mamute krishatanuriba bharam
Radhika birahay taba Keshaba
Sarasama srinamapi malayajapankam
Pashyati bishamiba bapusi sashankam
Swasita pabanamanupama parinahang
Madana dahanamiba dahati sadahang
Dishi dishi kirati sajala kanajalam
Nayana nalinamiba bigalita nalam
Nayana bishayamapi kisalaya talpam
Kalayati bihita hutasana kalpam
Tyajati na pani talen kapolam
Balasashinamiba sayam lolam
Haririti Haririti apati sakamam
Biraha bihita maraneba nikamam
Sri Jayadeva bhanitamiti Geetam
Sukhayato Keshaba padamupanutam

About Jayadeva's leanings to *Radha cult* Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan gives an altogether new interpretation. He thinks it is the influence of the *Shakti* cult prevalent in Bengal.

About *Gita Govinda*, Dr. Radhakrishnan writes, "The *Vaishnavism* of South India did not pay much attention to the glorification of the *Brindavana Lila* though some of the *Alvars* refer to *Krishna's* sports with the *Gopis*. In the north however the case was different. In Nimbarka, *Radha* the beloved mistress is not simply the chief of the *gopis* but is eternal consort of *Krishna*. The writing of Jayadeva, the author of *Gita Govinda*, *Vidyapati*, *Umapati* and *Chandidas* (Fourteenth Century), show the growing influence of the Radhakrishna cult

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in Bengal and Bihar, thanks to the influence of the *Shakta* system of thought and practice"

(*Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, p-760*)

This is perhaps based entirely on surmise and not factual.

According to Dr. Sashi Bhusan Dasgupta's *History of Shakta Sadhana and Shakta Literature* the first *Durga Puja* was performed in Bengal during the days of Akbar in the Sixteenth Century. From same source we learn that the first *Kali Puja* was performed in 1768 according to the guidance of Krishnananda Agambagish's *Tantrasar*. (pp 64-75).

Jayadeva was a court poet in the court of Lakshman Sen who himself was a devout follower of *Vishnu*. *Shakti* cult was not prevalent in Bengal during those days. The concept of *Radha* is deeper than mere male or female forms of deities. *Radha* is the supreme symbol of a devotee. She is not a mere woman lover. The main contributions of Jayadeva in the spiritual realm are two: First, the *Radha cult* is not an ordinary man-woman relationship, the orthodox school who had their reservations about *Krishna's* falling at the feet of *Radha* could not understand the basic idea of Jayadeva. It is not just a story of a romance. It is a bigger romance than a mere ordinary man-woman relationship. It is a challenge by a devotee to the Lord. It is a challenge to the love by the concentrated power of renunciation. *Radha* has left everything for His sake—the family moorings, the social contacts, even the husband not caring for social reaction. She has been completely infatuated in love with the lord. This is not an ordinary physical love. This is much higher spiritual love and one hundred percent more intoxicating. *Radha* is only the symbol. She stands for the *gopis*. The *gopis* stand for the devoted followers. *Radha* represents the devotees. *Krishna* is the devoted. It is the highest stage of *bhakta-Bhagawan* relation. It is firmly believed that the trinity consists of *Bhakta-Bhagawan* and *Bhagavat*. Somebody puts *Bhagavat* as number one because it is through *Bhagavat* that one gets enlightened. Some puts *Bhagawan* as number one, because He is the ultimate goal. Some puts *Bhakta* as number one because he has been sanctified by both. Jayadeva puts *Bhakta* as number one. It does not diminish

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his respect for the Lord. It shows, on the contrary, how powerful an ordinary devotee can become only through His mercy and blessings. Once the Almighty showers His *Karuna*, His divine blessings, the devotee becomes as powerful as the Lord. This shows the tremendous faith, confidence, trust in the Lord.

The second important contribution of Jayadeva in the spiritual realm is his brilliant composition of the *Dasavatar Stotram*. This again confirms his faith in *Krishna*. He describes in this immortal prayer-song all the ten *avataras* as the reincarnation of the same Lord. *Krishna* or *Vishnu* is described in his earlier lives.

The prayer-song is a popular household musical number throughout India.

The Saint would have been immortal even if he had not composed any other spiritual piece. The song has a universal appeal. Here, it will not be out of place to mention that the concept of *avatara* was already in vogue. We learn from the *Cultural Heritage of India* that "Traditions as to the number of *avataras* varied, and the later lists of the *avataras*, though the usual number ten is generally adhered to, very often offer different names. But the *Pauranic* verse enumerating *Matsya*, *Kurma*, *Varaha*, *Narasimha*, *Vamana*, the three *Ramas*, *Buddha* and *Kalki* as the ten *avataras*, almost universally recognized since the mediaeval period, is found in a Mamallapuram inscription of about the Eighth Century A.D. The *avatara* theory, which must have undergone several stages of evolution, appears to be based on old tales about strange animals exhibiting mysterious powers of helpfulness. Some of them, however, had originally little to do with *Vishnu*. The Buddhist conception of the former *Buddhas* may have influenced the development of the conception."

Jayadeva simply modifies the earlier versions. The original sacred *stotra* reads like a *mantra*:

Jayadeva's *Dashavatar-stotram*, describing the ten incarnations of the Lord is equally popular. It is chanted regularly in many temples even today. The song is—

Pralayapayodhijale dhritabansi Vedang
Bihatabahitra charitramakhedang

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Keshaba dhritameena sharira—Jai Jagadisha Hare
Jai Jagadisha Hare.
Kkshitiratibipulatare taba tisthati pristhe
Dharanidharanakinachakragarishthe
Keshaba dhritakachchaparupa-Jai Jagadisha Hare
Jai Jagadisha Hare.
Basati dashana Shikhare dharani taba lagna
Sashini Kalankakaleba nimagna
Keshaba dhrita shukara rupa—Jai Jagadisha Hare
Jai Jagadisha Hare.
Taba Karakamalabare nakhamadbhuta shringang
Dalita hiranyakashiputanubhringam
Keshaba dhritanaraharirupa,-Jai Jagadisha Hare
Jai Jagadisha Hare.
Chhalayasi vikramena balimadthutabaman
Padanakhanirajanita janapabana
Keshabahritabamanarupa,-Jai Jagadisha Hare
Jai Jagadisha Hare.
Kshatriyarudhiramaya jagadapagatapapang
Snapayasi payasi shamitabhabatapang
Keshaba dhritabhrigupatirupa—Jai Jagadisha Hare
Jai Jagadisha Hare.
Bitarasi dikshu rane dikpatikamaniyang
Dashamukhamoulibaling ramaniyam
Keshaba dhrita raghupatirupa Jai Jagadisha Hare
Jai Jagadisha Hare.
Bahasi bapusi bishade basanang jaladabhang
Halahati bhitimilita yamunabhang
Keshaba dhritahaladhararupa-Jai Jagadisha Hare
Jai Jagadisha Hare.
Nindasi yagnabidherahahashrutijatang
Sadaya hridaya darsitapashughatang
Keshaba dhritabuddhasharira—Jai Jagadisha Hare
Jai Jagadisha Hare.
Mlechchanibahanidhane kalayasi karabalang
Dhumketumiba kimapi karalam
Keshaba dhritakalkisarir,—Jai Jagadisha Hare
Jai Jagadisha Hare
Srijayadeva Kaberidamuditamudarang
Shrinu sukhadang shubhadang bhavasaram,

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Keshaba dhritadashabidharupa—Jai Jagadisha Hare
Jai Jagadisha Hare.

In this historic hymn Jayadeva praises Sri Krishna as *Vishnu* Himself and sings His glory and recalls all His ten *avataras*. According to Jayadeva they are *Fish*, *Tortoise*, *Boar*, *Man-lion*, *Dwarf*, *Rama-Bhargava*, *Rama-Dasarathi*, *Rama-Haladhara*, *Buddha* and *Kalki*. "This list came to be regarded as the most authentic since the early mediaeval period, though there was still some difference of opinion in regard to the position of *Krishna*. The Belawa (Dacca District, East Bengal) inscription of *c.* AD 1125, which belongs to a *paramavaisnava* ruler of East Bengal, mentions *Krsna* as *gopisata kelikara* and *Mahabharata sutradhara* and also as *amsakrtavatara* i.e. a partial incarnation. But an Ajmer inscription of about the same age seems to include *Krsna* among the ten *avataras* of *Vishnu*."

Jayadeva's *dasavatar-Stotra* has universal acceptibility. As it is observed against the background of the early history of *Vaishnavism Sri Vishnu* had been worshipped in different incarnations. It was not a new concept. There is reference of *avataras* even in the *Rig Veda*. "In the *Rig Veda* we have reference to *Vishnu's* three steps taken for (*Manu* or) man in distress." The conception of the Dwarf (*Vamana*), Fish (*Matsya*), and Tortoise (*Kurma*) *avataras* not yet associated with that god, are found in the *Satapatha* and other *Brahmanas*."

We learn from most authentic source that "in later mythology, the function of the Boar, Fish and Tortoise as forms of *Prajapati Brahma* is attributed to *Vishnu* the most benevolent of the gods.

The theory of *avatara* however has been popularised the most by the *Geeta*. "The idea of the *Geeta* that God manifestors Himself in all ages for the protection of the pious, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of religious order seems to have a universal appeal. The attempt appears to regard all religious teachers of the world as manifestation of God Himself.

Yada yadahi dharmasya glanirbhabat Bharata
abhyuththanan adharmasya tadatmanang srijamyahang

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pavitranaya sadhunang binashaya cha duskritang
dharma sthapanarthaya cha sambhabami yuge yuge.

These four lines of the *Geeta* explain, rather proclaim, the real spirit of Indian culture. It is here that Indian philosophy gives clear-cut recognition to all prophets of the world. Their appearance is welcome. They are received as messengers of God or perhaps more clearly as manifestations of God. They are not bound by any particular faith. They are not limited to any boundaries of walls. They are only saviours of mankind. They are not restricted to any particular periods.

The Lord says whenever and wherever religion be in danger and anti-religious activities prevail and gets an upper hand, I shall appear to save the righteous and destroy the evil makers. Here, of course, religion stands for righteousness, justice and truth. It has a wider role to play in daily life. Religion, in Indian perspective, stands for moral values. Anything against Truth, Justice, Human values is immoral. In India, there is no scope to decry and dishonour the faith of others. There is no religion in the world which does not form part of Indian culture. Indian culture has the fragrance of world culture. It has the divine touch of all world Prophets and Saints.

The concept of *avatara* is not a new one. Indian history records the vogue of *avatara* concept for several centuries. It is recorded: "The popularity of the worship of several *avataras* is attested by the Indian epigraphic records of the period between the Fourth and the Eighth Century AD. The name *Matsyagupta* (Literally, protected by the Fish) occurring in an inscription of AD 101 seems to indicate the popularity of the Fish-god before the rise of the Guptas, although he may or may not have been identified with *Vishnu* at that date. The worship of *Parasurama* in western India is indicated by another early record of the Second Century AD, but his being conceived as an *avatara* of *Vishnu* does not seem to be so early. An inscription of *Saka Rsabhadatta* at Nasik mentions *Ramatirtha* which is known from the *Mahabharata* (III 85.42) to have been the holy abode of *Rama Jamadagnya* situated in the suburbs of *Surparaka* (modern Sopara in the Thana District), not far to the north of Bombay. It is usually believed

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that the worship of *Rama-Dasarathi* was not popular in the Gupta age. But the idea seems to be wrong. As regards the *avatara* theory it has to be remembered that the apotheosis and worship of an incarnation are earlier than his identification with *Vishnu*. Kalidasa's *Raghuvansa* are earlier than his identification with *Vishnu*. Kalidasa's *Raghuvansa* (*c.* AD 400) speaks of Rama, son of Dasaratha, as an incarnation of *Hari* (Vishnu).

The most outstanding contribution of the saint, however, is his *Gita Govinda*.

Gita Govinda consists of three hundred *slokas*. "The theme is a *Ras-Lila* of the Lord *Sri Krishna* and *Sri Radha* in the sylvan surroundings of *Brindavan* in the month of the spring (*Basanta*). The subject is based on the detailed treatment of the incident in the *Garga Samhita* but enriched by the poet's personal experiences and made more charming and popular."

Some of the glimpses of the lilting lyrics are simply most enchanting.

Radha and *Krishna* are shown in the background of natural flora and fauna in *Brindavan* in spring in a fascinating romantic scene. In one brilliant description the saint sings:

The sky is clouded. The multi-hued clouds hang low in clusters like unto the *Tamal* boughs.

The scene frightens the child *Krishna* resting in the laps of His father *Nanda*—the Ruler of *Braja*.

Sri *Radha* appears on the scene at that moment and entreated by *Sri Nanda*, takes Krishna home.

The light that is *Sri Radha* brightens the path that *Krishna* treads.

Arm in arm, in love's embrace—they go, tasting the nectarean drops flowing from the divine lips of the Couple-Divine to the bowers (*Kunjas*) that lie near King *Nanda's* home."

The highest teaching of Sri *Krishna* in *Geeta* is renunciation—*Tyag*. As an enlightened Saint Jayadeva followed this principle of renunciation most religiously. We are told by a learned scholar:

"Jayadeva, conversant with this supreme nature of *Krishna*, had willingly chosen poverty as his bride. He was originally a *paramahamsa* who was so strict in his renunciation, that he

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would not stay for more than a night even under a tree let alone the building of a cottage for himself. But the Lord wished to propagate through him the cult of *Bhakti*. He was therefore married by the Lord's command, but never led the usual conjugal life. His wife Sri Padmavati was really a companion in his worship, and he accepted her only as a partaker in his worship. She used to dance, as he repeated the lines of *Gita Govinda* before Lord—*Sri Radha Madhava*."

It might have been a coincidence that in the Saint's own life too Padma seems to be equally, if not more spiritually, advanced. As the Saint assigned so high a place to *Sri Radha*, his admirers sometimes are inclined to say that the consort of the Saint had more visions of the Lord than the Saint himself. It seems Padma even spoke to Him when He came to the house to supply food in the absence of the Saint and showed her the wound on his body which was actually a cut due to saint's piercing the word *bahamyahang*. Again when the Lord came to complete the sentence of *Gita Govinda* in the guise of Jayadeva she could not distinguish between the two. The saint himself observed that she was luckier than he was as to have repeated *darshans* of the Lord.

The philosophy of life of Jayadeva was renunciation and complete surrender to the Lord. He avoided the rich people so that wealth did not allure him. He surrendered himself completely at the feet of *Krishna*. He completely identified himself with the spirit of the *Geeta*. *Gita-Govinda's Radha* is none but Jayadeva himself. He worships the Lord like *Radha*. So this is so vivid, lively and spontaneous.

For a versatile genius like Jayadeva it was not at all difficult to lead a luxurious life. But he chose the better path. He did not like to accept any favour from the royal exchequer. The *Sufi* saints too behaved the same way. Jayadeva thought that would throw him farther from God. About him it is recorded:

"Although Jayadeva was patronised by the *Rajas*, he always eschewed their company to teach the spiritual world the truth of the saying of the seers—

"When the Dervish frequents the rich, know that he is a hypocrite; but when he frequents kings, know that he is a thief."

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This was because Jayadeva had surrendered himself completely at the feet of his Master like a true devotee. He had realised the whole essence of *Geeta*. Why should a saint of his status beg to a mere *raja* or a rich man? He depended entirely on *Krishna*. In the *Geeta* the Lord says

anonyaschintayantomam jejana puryupasate
Teshang nityovijuktosmi yogakshema bahamyahang

I always take charge of those who, forgetting everything else, depend entirely on me.

Once it so happened that both Padma and Jayadeva had no food for days together. They were living on boiled tamarind water. The saint would not ask for food from anybody. He had so much faith in *Krishna* that he did not like to bring this poverty-stricken condition even to the *Raja* whom he knew so well. So out of *abhiman*, (as a protest), the saint had cut the line *bahamyahang* and left for the bathing-ghat. The legend goes that *Krishna* came to his house with food and shared a bit of it along with Padma, the devotee's wife, and even told her about the "stabbing". Jayadeva, an enlightened soul, could understand his mistake when he heard the whole story on return from the ghat and replaced it by writing the word three times.

The impact of the Saint on the literary heritage of India has been tremendous. Unlike other great saints who composed in one of the regional languages Jayadeva gave us his immortal message in a language which is the mother of all Indian languages—Sanskrit. So the literary luminaries throughout India must have enjoyed *Gita Govinda* equally. They must have been inspired too.

Only a scholar well used in all languages or scholars from all languages can evaluate the contribution of the Saint in flourishing these regional literary treasures.

Rabindranath Tagore was greatly inspired by the lilting metres and the sparkle of words, the jingling rhythm of the songs. He has recorded its tremendous impact on his mind. His Boswell, Prabhat Mukherjee, tells us in *Rabindra-Jeevani*, Vol. I "The Sanskrit metres had a special attraction for him. The sweet wave of dance of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* had

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simply fascinated the young boy Rabindranath. He has recorded that in details in *Jeevan Smriti*. The copy of the *Gita Govinda* which the boy could procure had the *slokas* vertically arranged. It was difficult to distinguish between the *stanzas* as there was no punctuation in the printed book. The day he discovered the correct metre was a memorable one in his life. Only for the metre and rhyme the poet copied the whole of *Gita Govinda* by hand. It was a great memorable day for him.

Gita Govinda was a great inspiration to the author of Geetanjali

One of the finest interlocutary dance-dramas that Tagore wrote was *Barsa mangal*, welcome to the rains. The tremendous influence of Jayadeva has been observed by critics. In *Rabi Rashmi*, the literary critic particularly points out the rhythm and words of Jayadeva:

Chala sakhi kunjam satimira punjang
Shilaya neela nicholam
(*Gita Govindam* 5.8)

Neela nichola charu Sudrishang pratyangam
alingati (*Gita Govindam* 11.2) *or*

Nababhavad-Ashokdal-sayanasare
Prabisha Radhey Madhava samipam iha
(*Gita Govindam*, 21.2)

Tagore wrote in *Bharati* two poems on the God of Love—*Madan*. Both in thoughts and even in metre they were in the style of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* and it has been shown even how to read it:

Badasi yadi kinchidapi dantaruchikoumudi
harati dara timiramati ghoram
sphuradadhara sidhabey taba badana chanhama
rochayati lochana chakoram
Priyecharu shilay muncha moyee mana manidanam
Sapadi madananlodahati mana manasang dehi
Mukha kamalamadhupanam

Sir Edwin Arnold has translated this brilliantly:

Speak once more! then thou canst not choose but show
Thy mouths unparalleled and honeyed wonder
Where like pearls hid in red-lipped shells, the row

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of pearly teeth; Thy rose-red lips lie under;
Ah me! I am that bird that woos the moon
And pines, poor fool; to make it glitter soon.

Krishna tells *Radha*

My Queen, my crowned Mistress, my Shepherd Bride!
Take this for truth, that what I say beside,
Of bold love-grown full-orbed at sight of Thee,
May be forgiven with a quick remission,
For Thou divine fulfilment of all hope!
Thou all undreamed completion of the vision!
I gaze upon Thy beauty and my fear
Passes as clouds do, when the moon shines clear.
So if Thou art angry still this shall avail,
Look straight at me, and let Thy bright glances wound me.
Fetter me! gyne me! Lock me in the gaol
of Thy delicious arms; make fast around me.
The silk soft manacles of wrists and hands
Then kill me! I shall never break those bands.
The starlight jewels flashing on Thy breast
Have not my right to hear Thy beating heart;
The happy jasmine buds that clasp Thy waist
Are soft userpers of my place and part;
If that fair girdle only there must shine,
Give me the girdle's life—the girdle mine!

Krishna is impatient. *Krishna* implores to *Radha*:

I know that Thou art *Radha*—that this will
Last and be heaven: that I have leave to rise
Up from Thy feet and look into Thine eyes.

So they met and so they ended
Pain and parting being blended
Life with life made one for ever
In high love—and Jayadeva
Hasteneth on to close the story
Of their bridal grace and glory!

There are many orthodox *Vaishnavas* who even now do not accept Jayadeva's Radha making the Lord fall at Her feet. How can he fall at anybody's feet be she or he any high? But

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that is allowed in love. Love, affection, deep devotion are mutual and reciprocal.

This interlocutary dance-drama has been presented in many forms in India. The best version has been based on Oddissi style although attempts have been made in the popular *Kathakali* numbers. It has influenced cultural life richly.

"The Malayalam country has its own religious plays.

Taking its inspiration originally from the singing and gesticulation of the *Gita-Govinda* of Jayadeva, the religious drama of Kerala developed into the Sanskrit *Krishnottama* and from that evolved into the Malayalam *Kathakali*, the last having been fashioned by the chief of *Kothurakkara* in the latter half of the Seventeenth Century for the sake of a wider popular appeal."

"*Yadi Hari smarane sarasam manah*
Yadi vilakalasu kutuhalam
Madhur komal kanta padavali
Srinu tada Jayadeva saraswatim.

If thy heart is steeped in contemplation and softened by the remembrance of *Hari*, and you are possessed by the insatiable desire to hear of His supreme and transcendental deeds and of the pure dalliance dances which He enjoyed with His devotees (the *Gopis* of *Braja*—then with faith and purity of body, mind and heart hear thou this poem of Jayadeva.

The Saint invites his audience to listen to the songs to the glory of *Hari*, the Lord, to share the divine nectar distributed by him. At the same time he warns them. They must listen to these songs with a pure heart. Their mind must be clear to receive—the noble, the serene *Hari*. Even now in *Brindavan*, people recite *Gita Govinda* only after a proper drill of purity. Some devotees even observe fast and prayers before reciting *Gita Govinda*. Because of the association of the Lord to complete the sentence, because of the saintly descriptions with deep feeling of the affectionate regards for the Lord, people accept the lines of *Gita Govinda* not as a mere song but as *mantra*, a religious prayer with all solemnity.

Another reason to be so pure in mind and soul at this time is the company of the Lord. The legend goes that wherever

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Gita Govinda is recited, the Lord comes to listen to it Himself. Mahaprabhu Srikrishna Chaitanya confirmed it and listened to it everyday.

"So long as Sanskrit language lives Jayadeva's name shall flourish. In the Temple of Love his name is written in divine letters for all time. He was a great singer and a poet, but above all a saint whose devotion for *Sri Radha-Krishna* and whose renunciation, shed indelible lustre on the canvas of time and spread a fragrance which even lures the Lord to play the *bhramar* (bee) on the elegant bouquet offered by Sri Jaideo Ji in the form of the great song *Sri Gita Govinda*."

There is hardly anything to add to this tribute by a saint who enjoys the nectar of *Gita-Govinda* everyday in the holy city of *Brindavan*. His expressions represent and confirm the thought of millions of *Vaishnavas* who worship *Sri Vishnu* in the incarnation of *Krishna* in the immortal *mantra* given in *Dasavatarastotram*. Jayadeva was a court poet of Lakshman Sen of Bengal. In his monumental *Bangla Desher Itihas* in four volumes, the eminent historian Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar gives two important facts about the Saint poet. First, his parents' background and secondly, he confirms that Jayadeva hailed from Bengal. There is controversy over the poet's origin. There are reasons to believe that Jayadeva hails from Orissa. May be due to daily recital of *Gita-Govinda* at Lord *Jagannatha's* Temple he is, in modern times, more popular there than anywhere else, and the scholars are inclined to believe that the saint hails from Orissa. May be due to linguistic affinity between Oriya and the style of Jayadeva's simple sanskrit these scholars have been guided to think that he is from Orissa.

The theory that Kendubilwa, a town in Birbhum district in West Bengal which attracts thousands of pilgrims every year on the poet's memorial service may not be tenable only to confirm that he was not from Orissa. The poet died in Kendubilwa. There is no detail where he was born. He was a Court Poet in Lakshman Sen's Court. So what? A poet from Orissa could have been the chief court poet too there. Bengali language two thousand years ago, was the same as Oriya. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee opined that the original Bengali

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script was akin to Oriya. This is a minor matter whether Jayadeva belonged to Bengal or Orissa.

The fact is, today Jayadeva is much more discussed, recited and his *Gita Govinda* and *Dasavatarastotram* staged in the *Oddissi* dance numbers much more regularly in Orissa than anywhere else. *Gita Govinda* is recited everyday in the most sacred spot in Orissa—Jagannath Temple, Puri, every night before the Lord's *sayana*. The dance experts have presented and popularised Jayadeva abroad several times presenting his immortal songs through interlocutary dance-dramas purely in the *Oddissi* style.

As it is annually held in Kendubilwa, the poet is remembered through the memorial service. But Orissa has kept Jayadeva very much alive and even if the poet were born in Bengal, today, for all practical purposes, Jayadeva belongs to Orissa. To the author, of course, this minor question is a futile waste of time. By and large Jayadeva was an Indian and that is his introduction. Outside the country who does bother to know about the details of State, district or village? Jayadeva was an Indian first and Indian last and when some writer will write about him fifty years hence he will write only Jayadeva was an important citizen of the world.

Culturally and emotionally *Gita Govinda* has played an important role which is equally important as much as spiritually. The artistes have given shape, through different dance-numbers, to this immortal literary piece and have carried the message of the Saint to different parts of the country and abroad. The prayer song has become a beautiful piece of the finest themes centring round many interlocutary dance-dramas which have been built up in varied styles keeping the main literary matter in both *Gita Govinda* and *Dasavatarstotram* intact.

In his *Bangla Desher Itihas*, Vol. I *Prachin Yug*, the eminent learned historian, Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar maintains that "There is no doubt that among the court poets of Lakshman Sen Jayadeva was the greatest. The *Komala Karta Padavalis* have been enjoyed and deeply appreciated not only by the *Vaishnavas* but the connoisseur of literature have drawn eternal pleasure out of this immortal literary piece. In the whole of Sanskrit literature there is hardly any parallel to

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such sweet, popular piece of so high standard. There are forty or more commentaries on *Gita Govinda*. There are twelve or fourteen epics written in the style of *Gita Govinda*. This shows the popularity *Gita Govinda* commands in the cultural history of India. This tremendous popularity of the Saint Poet has inspired the people of *Mithila* and Orissa to claim a poet of their respective land. But on the bank of the river *Ajay*, the Village Kenduvilwa's claim as the poet's birth-place is confirmed by the memorial mass congregation *mela* on the *Pous Sankranti* day at Kenduvilwa. So till further details are available there is no reason to brush aside the theory that Kenduvilwa was the birth place of the Saint." (p. 146—translated from Bengali by author).

The historian further says, "No details are available on the life of Jayadeva. From a *sloka* in *Gita Govinda*, however, we learn that the Saint's father's name was Bhojdeva and the mother's Ramdevi. He has mentioned the mother's name also as Radhadevi and somewhere as Bamadevi. Perhaps his wife's name was Padmavati. That the Saint poet was expert in music is illustrated by the very style of composition of *Gita Govinda*, because many of the *Padas* have been composed only to fit them for music."

The historian, who completely neglected Jayadeva in his marathan *Advanced History of India*, (there is no mention of the name even of such a great Saint poet, not even in the brief section on cultural life during the days of Lakshman Sen where Jayadeva was the greatest Court Poet without accepting any fees) writes in this book in Bengali:

"*Gita Govinda* describes the romance between *Radha* and *Krishna*. The *Vaishnava Sampradaya* of Bengal considers it as a great romantic treatise with a high spiritual message but besides giving a spiritual message the book may certainly claim a very high place even for its literary merit. The style leans more towards *apabhramsa* Bengali or *Maithili padavalis* than classical Sanskrit. Some scholars think *Gita Govinda* was first composed in *apabhramsa* or ancient Bengali and later on transformed into Sanskrit. But this theory is not acceptable to the majority". (pp. 146-47—translated from Bengali).

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A scholar mendicant, devotee of the Lord, writes, "Even today the little village of Kendubilwa (in Birbhum district in West Bengal) where Jaideoji passed the last portion of his life is reputed as being the spot where this great saint and his consort had *darshan* of their favourite Lord *Sri Radha-Krishna*. The spiritual life of a *Sri Radha-Krishna*-devotee is incomplete if he was not drunk the nectarean drops from out of this spring of Divine Love—the *Gita Govinda*."

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BAKHTIYAR KAKI

(AD—1235 AD)

In keeping with the tradition of Indian philosophy, the Sufi Saints had shown remarkable spirit of renunciation. In the face of hunger and poverty they refused to accept royal patronage and gifts of land and money. They exemplified in their own lives the ideal way of god-reailsation. They experimented with their own lives the different ways of winning over sufferings and pangs of poverty. Search for truth was their only goal in life. They assimilated the best of the teachings of the Prophet and the message of *Vedanta*. Service to man and love for all were given preference to ritualistic drills. One of such top mystic Sufi Saint was Bakhitiyar Kaki.

Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, the spiritual preceptor of many mystic saints of the medieval period hailed from Aush. He had his education in Baghdad, the great seat of Muslim learning.

Kaki came in touch with the greatest mystic Saint of India Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti at Baghdad and became his disciple. Muinuddin Chishti Sahib initiated Kaki in the mosque of Imam Abu Laith Samarq and in Baghdad. He became so much attached to his spiritual preceptor that he did not like to live in Baghdad when Chishti left for India. He left his hearth and home and decided to live in India where he was welcomed with open arms. Kaki came to India by a different route and made Multan his headquarters. But local spiritual leaders could not stand the importance of the Khwaja.

To quote Dr. Nizami, "Khwaja Qutb-u'd-din was staying in the mosque when Shaikh Baha-u'd-din Zakariyya arrived. The Suharwardi saint did not like the stay of Khwaja Qutb-u'd-din in Multan and considered it an unbearable intrusion into his own spiritual jurisdiction. The polite way of asking a saint to leave one's jurisdiction (*walayat*) was to place his shoes in the direction one would like him to go. Shaikh Baha-u'd-din

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Zakariyya did so and Khwaja Qutb-u'd-din Bakhtiyar, taking the hint, left for Delhi."

So Khwaja Qutbuddin left for Delhi along with his disciple Baba Farid.

Delhi was being ruled by Iltutmish who was known for his love for spiritual inclinations. "To this city flocked eminent Muslim saints, divines and scholars from all sides and the enlightened and liberal patronge of Sultan Iltutmish ordered them a safe heaven of refuge."

The emperor of Delhi came to know about the arrival of the great Saint to his capital. A royal invitation was sent to to him immediately. The divine man did not like to stay in the royal palace. The Saint preferred living outside the capital city. The emperor was not at all discouraged. He started visiting him instead. Qutbuddin, for all practical purposes, became the spiritual *guru* of the emperor. The Saint insisted on the royal guest to look after the people of the land rather than concentrating only on a *durvesh*. He used to say, "O ruler of Delhi : It is incumbent on thee to be good to all poor people, mendicants, durveshes and helpless folk. Treat all men kindly and strive for their welfare. Everyone who thus behaves towards his subjects is looked after by the Almighty and all his enemies turn into friends."

Iltutmish wanted to make Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki the spiritual head of the State. The Saint refused that too. Sheikh Nazimuddin Sughra was appointed the spiritual head of the State—*Sheik-ul-Islam*. Sughra did not have much spiritual attainment. So when he got the royal appointment he thought of discrediting Qutbuddin Baktiyar Kaki. He was not only a person of ordinary calibre but a person of vindictive nature. His jealousy against royal devotion to Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki made him stoop low to lower the saint in the eyes of the public. The people were equally devoted to Qutbuddin too.

By chance Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, the guru, was also present in Delhi during this period. He came to know the whole thing. He decided to leave the royal hosts and directed the disciple to follow him. They got ready for Ajmer, where Chishti had his other disciples and the mosque, the headquartes.

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People of Delhi came to know about the decision. They all thronged in thousands to stop the Saints. Nothing doing. Chishti told the illustrious disciple not to look back. "We do not want royal patronage, we do not want money, we want to pray in peace."

The emperor had sent important emissaries to stop the Saints. They all failed. The whole team only travelled on foot. The two Saints started their journey. With them thousands of people of Delhi too followed. This news reached the emperor Iltutmish. He ran himself to stop the Saints from leaving Delhi. He fell at the feet of the saints and begged of Muinuddin to let kaki stay back in Delhi. This was granted. The emperor was happy to take with him his spiritual preceptor and touched the feet of Muinuddin Chishti for the kindness.

Qutbuddin returned back to the capital along with Baba Farid. Delhi at that time was the centre of learning of the enlightened world. People used to flock to the capital city, not only from different parts of India but also from long distances particularly from the middle east. Hazrat Muinuddin Chishti Sahib wanted his disciple to spread the message of equality and service to humanity. People were very much attracted by the Saint's message of love, equality and service to all. For a long time people were restricted to rituals in caste-ridden social order. They were spell bound by the new approach to spiritual life. The new message stressed the moral and ethical values in the life and the outlook being quite liberal at once was acceptable to all. The weaker members of social order, who had been exploited for centuries because of the corrupt caste system found a new window in their so long dark a horizon. The lowly, the meek, the *sarbahara*, one who had nothing to fall back upon, banked on the new outlook and got new inspiration in life. He also found life meaningful and significant. He came forward to serve his fellow brethren and make his life a useful one.

In the cultural history of India, a new chapter was written and while spreading the new gospel of love, the great Sufi saints-Hazrat Sheikh Niza muddin Chishti, his equally illustrious disciple Sheikh Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki and his disciple, equally enlightened, Baba Farid, played an important role.

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Perhaps it, went to climax when Baba Farid's world famous disciple Hazrat Sheikh Nizamudd-in Auliya Sahib took up the task of serving mankind by instilling in every human being the message of equality, love and service with a new zeal.

Never in the history of India came in succession a line of saints of four generations. It was a happy coincidence and the countrymen get full benefit of it when just within few centuries the full harvest was reaped by a galaxy of Saints like Guru Nanak, Kabir, Ramananda, Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya, Ravidas, Vallabhacharya and so many of them who came out on public streets and spread the message with a new vigour. They embraced all with open arms and proclaimed loudly that man is the final goal of service. There is nothing higher than man. All scholars accept the idea that the *Bhakti* movement of the medieval age was just not an accident. It was the result of the earlier Sufi movement which worked slowly and silently in the new social order.

The Sufi ideology was acceptable to all because the general intelligentsia found that it was a happy blend of *Upanishadic* philosophy and the holy thoughts of the Prophet. Even in the ordinary day to day customeries there were many similarities.

For instance our history of India's culture records, "The Sufis adopted several spiritual practices of the Hindus, e.g. shaving the head of new entrant to the mystic fold, the *talz anbtl* (bowl) for collecting food, offering water to visitors, *makus* (inverted forty day ritual), which Sheikh Fariduddin Ganj-i- Shakar is reported to have performed, was taken from the *Ordhamukhi Sadhus*. Further *Habs-i-dam* was taken from the Hindu Yogis."

Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar setted in Delhi. He preferred Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti's discipleship although Baghdad was a great centre of spiritual pursuits and had great spiritual luminaries like Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani and Sheikh Abul Najib Suharwardi.

He was already popular for his extraordinary miraculous powers. Delhi people heard about many such activities. For instance when the Saint reached India he first reached Multan which was a great centre of learning. Multan was under the rule of Nasiruddin Qubacha. When Qubacha was attacked by

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Mongols-who were frequently mounting attacks from different corners—he surrendered himself before the Saint and begged him of spiritual blessings to get out of the trouble. It is recorded "Giving him an arrow, the Khwaja suggested he should shoot it blindly into the enemy's camp. Qubacha obeyed and the following day the Mongols retreated". This might have been a coincidence. The Mongols might have left for strategic reasons, but the ruler's faith in the Saint had been doubly confirned. He started looking at the Saint with great reverance and the incident was a popular subject for common man's discussion. The anecdote spread like wild fire.

The ruler of Delhi was Iltutmish. When the Saint touched Delhi, the emperor extended him a hearty welcome. He invited Qutbuddin to live in the royal city. But that was not to be. The Saint did not like to settle in the midst of a big crowd. He settled in a small place called Kilukhari on the river Jamuna.

The royal disciple would not be happy at this arrangement. He wanted presence of the Saint near him. He brought him to Delhi finally. The Saint gave his *Darshan* to the big royal visitors only twice a week. Iltutmish used to look after the royal *guru* through his emissaries regularly and used to visit him humbly in person. But the saint hardly distinguished between a royal visitor and an ordinary man on the street. He would refuse royal gifts. His personal needs were scanty and he was fond of concentration through fasts. There are stories about miraculous gift of bread to the Saint. The saint did not depend on royal favour for his bread. He got it from divine source. The stories are really interesting.

According to Dr. Razvi, "As he devoted himself entirely to fasting and praying, in true ascetic fashion, Khwaia Qutu'-Din and his family lived in highly impoverished circumstances. Two versions explaining the addition to his name of the word *kaki* or Man of Bread, exist and serve to depict the way in which he lived. According to Amir Khwurd, the Khwaja would on occasions borrow up to thirty *dirhams* (copper coins) from a neighbouring Muslim grocer for household expenses, repaying the money as soon as some *futuh* was received. Later he decided to give up borrowing to suffice his family's needs and a piece of bread would miraculously

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appear under his prayer carpet. The grocer asked his spouse to discover from the Khwaja's wife why they no longer borrowed. The wife revealed the secret of the bread's appearance and it never appeared again."

"The second story comes from Jamali. According to him the Khwaja's family totalled nine. His wife occasionally borrowed some money from a neighbour, a Muslim grocer, in order to feed her starving family. On one occasion the grocer's wife taunted the Khwaja's wife that without their loan the family would have starved to death. The latter related the conversation to her husband who, after meditation, asked his wife to go there and recite *Bismillah* and she would get as much bread as she needed. So the Khwaja became known as *Kaki* as he lived on miraculously received breads alone."

Although a married person, the Saint cared very little for household affairs. He knew almost nothing about the house. He spent all his time in devotional activities. Prayers took all his time. The saint had two sons. One was seven when he died of illness. The tragedy in the family did not touch the Saint. But when he saw the deeply depressed state of his wife's mind he was upset. His wife lamented later that one single prayer of the Saint or his simple wish to recover the son perhaps could have saved the son. But nobody told the saint about the child's illness lest his prayers were disturbed. A similar incident took place just two centuries later when an intimate disciple of Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya lost his son. The funeral was arranged quietly. The poor father did not divulge the incident to anybody lest Sri Chaitanya's *Kirtan*—which was in full swing on his courtyard, got stopped!

The most important episode in the life of Khwaja Qutbuddin Bhaktiyar Kaki was the construction of a tank for the common man in the capital.

Khwaja Sahib wanted to live near his *guru* Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer. But the latter advised him to stay in Delhi and serve the people in the capital by spreading the great message of brotherhood of man. So he had to satisfy himself by staying in Delhi. The main difficulty with the large number of people who were coming to visit him was scarcity of water. The emperor came to know about it and immediately agreed to help the saint in the new task. The story goes that when the

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problem of fixing a proper site was discussed the saint took time to get divine order. It seems he wanted to know about the proper site from the Prophet who did appear before him and gave him direction about the proper site.

This incident is vividly described in the biography in an interesting manner. The story is indeed a historical fact and is popular in the whole of Delhi.

"A traditional story which presents the sanctity and supernatural powers of Khwaja Qutbu'd-Din Bakhtiyar involved a tank which was built to overcome Delhi's water shortage. Sultan Iltutmish devised a scheme for it, but was unsure where to choose the site. According to tradition, the Prophet Muhammad appeared to both the Sultan and the Khwaja, indicating a particular spot. *Hauzi-i-Shamsi* was excavated, and the area became significant, not only as a source of water, but more importantly, as a cultural and religious centre, where the spiritual and intellectual *elite* of Delhi would gather."

A number of great scholars like Jamali, Amir Khusro, S.A.A. Rizvi confirm the incident.

Once a poet approached the Saint to bless him before he appeared in the royal court to recite his poems. His fame for spiritual power had spread far and wide. People thought anything was possible with his blessings. So people started flocking to him with varied requests. This poet was also somehow convinced that if he had the Saint's blessings, he would definitely win favour of the emperor. He would simply not leave the feet of the master. How could he help asked the Saint. But the poet would not leave him.

Finally the saint blessed him. The happy poet went to the royal court.

He started reciting his poems. But the emperor was absent mindedly thinking of something else. The poet could feel that the emperor was not listening to his poetry. He immediately stopped recitation and meditated for a while on the Saint. A miracle took place. The emperor not only started listening to his poems, he asked him to repeat his performance. The emperor presented him a huge sum of money in recognition of his poetic genius. The happy poet came to the Saint and

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offered him the amount. The saint was happy but did not touch a coin.

The greatest message of the saint which he repeatedly uttered before all and finally to his own greatest disciple as his final direction was "to assist people who were needy without heeding the result." When people approached his disciple Baba Farid for amulets from the Saint, the latter approached the *guru* asking again for his direction. How did he prepare the amulets?

Yes, you too can certainly give amulets to them all for fulfilling their desires. You simply write the name of God and give it to them. "The fulfilment of desire belonged to no-one. The amulets contain God's name and His words and can be given to the people", he said.

This is a greatly significant thing in the religious lives of India. So long, for thousands of years the millions of Indian devotees have been believing only in ritualistic forms of religious activities. They were restricted only to the limited Brahmins. If a non-Brahmin wanted to perform any religious works he had to get it arranged through a Brahmin priest. Here was a very easy solution. Just by uttering the holy name of God one could get his wishes fulfilled: There is no *via-media*—no priest or *moulavi*. No ritualistic activities. The easiest way of communication with God. Remembering Him wholeheartedly meant inspiring oneself with spiritual power.

It is the biggest contribution of the Sufi saints. It was perhaps from here that the later Saints of the *Bhakti* Movement derived their inspiration. Even Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavira had directed to follow the noble Eight-fold Path and Principle of Non-violence to be practised for religious perfection. The Sufi Saints Hazrat Sheikh Muinuddin Chishti, Sheikh Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Baba Farid, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya made the matter easier for all. Simply take the *name*, just utter the holy name and your salvation is ascertained. All later great saints like Guru Nanak, Kabir, Ramananda, Sri Chaitanya, Ravidas stressed only this aspect of religious lives. Some of the modern great saints like Sri Ramakrishna, Maharshi Ramana, Thakur Anukul too said the

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same things. They realised God only through self enlightened uttering of the holy name millions of times.

There cannot be any other way to salvation in the *Kaliyuga*, challenged Sri Chaitanya, as recorded in *Chaitanya Charitamrita*.

The Chishti mystic saints maintained a very high degree of scholarly standard throughout. They did insist that bookish knowledge was not enough. What was needed was enlightened knowledge through spiritual insight. That, they insisted, needed a thoroughly intellectual background. An illiterate man cannot understand them. They too did not like to waste any time in explaining preliminaries to the novices. Their interpretations of divine Truth was quite subtle and it was but natural that an ignorant mind would have stumbled at every step. How can one, asks Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, distinguish between illusion and reality? Will he not get stuck up in a spiritual morass? The Saint insisted, "An illiterate mystic falls a prey in the hands of the devil."

The saint said this to Baba Farid who asked for initiation. "Have you completed your studies—the religious scriptures? Are you fully prepared for it?"

So Baba Farid had to pursue his studies. The Saint became a great scholar only at the repeated persistence of the *Guru*. "True to the highest traditions of medieval mysticism, Sheikh Farid strove for the best education that was possible in his days. Early in his life he had desired to abandon his studies and follow Sheikh Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, but the Saint advised him to complete his education before turning to the discipline of his soul. After years of strenuous effort and *struggle* he completed his education and attained to a high degree of scholarship."

This knowledge was not meant for parading one's ego. This was a preparation for life. It was blended with "humility, sympathy and understanding."

The group songs in praise of the Lord, *Qawalis*, were also a novel contribution of the Sufi saints. It was introduced by the greatest of them, Hazrat Muinuddin Chishti. Even a strong orthodox and conservative emperor like Aurangzeb changed his mind and went to Ajmer to listen to the group songs for the second time and gave each musician royal awards.

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It was from this *Qawalis* that the *Bhakti Movement* saints formed the style of group song and introduced *Samkirtanas*. Sultan Hussain gives us a vivid picture of the group songs by the Sufis in his enchanting *Mujalisul Usaahaq* written in 1502-03 A.D. The picture there depicts Sufis dancing and singing in glory of God. They all are in great ecstasy. The picture will remind any one of the later group *kirtanas* by the *Vaishnava* saints like Chaitanya.

The Sufis have assigned quite a high place to community prayer. That is the second most important contribution of these saints to the cultural heritage of India. Before this, in the Vedic rituals, not only non-Brahmins, even women were not allowed to join the Sacred-Fire ceremonies like *Yagnas*.

As a result of this community prayers, and common utterances of the holy name, the moral values of the ordinary men had been uplifted and the centuries-old fossilised casteism done away with.

The saint's death was pre-meditated. He passed away with full consciousness. He had no ailment. He knew by intuition about this. The Saint used to go in trance whenever somebody sang a particular song composed by an earlier Sufi saint, Sheikh Ahmed of Jam.

The martyr of the dagger of surrender
Each moment gets a new life from the unseen worId!

It was like a *bhava samadhi*. The Saint used to be in mere ecstasy.

One day he requested some musician to sing that favourite piece. Each time he heard it he fell into trance and each time he got consciousness he would request him to repeat it. Finally he rested in *mahasmadhi* never to return to normalcy. He became a martyr of the dagger of *taslim*. He surrendered himself at the feet of the Lord never to return again. That was in autumn (November 1235) A.D.

His earthly body was buried at Mehrauli near Delhi. Qutab Minar built by his illustrious disciple, emperor Iltutmish, had been named after him. That is the tallest minar in the country. The ideas of the saint are 'perhaps thousand times higher'.

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NIZAMUDDIN AULIYA
THE GREAT SUFI SAINT OF DELHI

(1238 AD—1325 AD)

The most popular sufi Saint of Delhi, Hazarat Nizamuddin Auliya is most respected equally by all people of different faiths. He represents secular character of Indian culture. In the realm of spirituality he has a high place on all-India basis. He was undoubtedly the greatest Saint of the fourteenth century. He was one of the greatest saints of the land. During his long life of eighty seven years, the Saint made Delhi the spiritual centre of attraction for thousands. Even today the *Darga* of Nizamuddin is a holy pilgrimage for people belonging to different religious-faiths—Hindus, Muslims, Christians alike. He was the greatest among the disciples of Baba Farid.

Nizamuddin Auliya belonged to a family which had migrated to India. The Saint's grandfather belonged to Bukhara but he was hundred percent Indian by birth. Auliya was born in 1238 A.D. on Akhri Chahar Shamba at Badaun, Uttar Pradesh. His descent is traced to the family of the Holy Prophet through Imam Hussain. His father Khawaja Syed Ahmed was a highly scholarly person and of high moral values and was respected much for his integrity. The ruler appointed him the *Qazi* of the town for this but he did not accept it because it was against his aptitude. He was a man of religious temperament. He would prefer spending his time in meditation. His mother Bibi Zuleikha was equally or perhaps more devoted to God.

His father Ahmed had christened the son as Muhammad. Muhammad was hardly five year old when he lost his father. The whole responsibility fell on the mother. It was not an easy task. And the deeply devoted lady did her duties more than brilliantly by presenting the country one of the most celebrated saints with a divine message. It was left to the

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helpless widow to appoint suitable teachers for the young child.

Child Muhammad was put under the charge of Sahdi Muqiri who had specialised in the Holy *Quran*. Like his *guru* Baba Farid, young Auliya too memorised the whole of the scripture by heart.

Unfortunately Muhammad was extremely poor. Except a big heart of the mother and a crystal clear mind of his own, the young Muhammad had nothing to fall back on. In fact it became a problem for him when he graduated and was asked to buy a turban which was similar to modern convocation dress. It was a big drill for the mother to weave a big turban with the help of the kind neighbours. Maulana Alauddin Usuli, the kind hearted teacher arranged a feast in honour of the fresh graduate. He supplemented the extra food that was necessary on the august occasion. The great Saint Ali Maula presided on the convocation ceremony.

The Saint, even in childhood, was an incarnation of humility and a symbol of purity. According to Dr. S.A.A. Rizvi "Around 1253 when ordered to put on a turban as a sign of his graduation, Nizamudd Din was without funds to buy one. His mother however assisted by her slave girl spun some yarn and a neighbour speedily wove material for a turban. With some sweets he went to Maulana Alaud Din who supplemented some more food from his own house in order to make a feast. Ali Maula, a great saint was invited. After the meal the Maulana took the turban and asked Ali Maula to wrap it around Shaikh Nizamud Din's head. At each winding Shaikh Nizamud Din placed his head at the foot at Shaikh Ali. So touched was the Shaikh that he prophesied Shaikh Nizamudd Din's future prominence as a saint. There were two reasons which prompted this. Ali Maula stated: firstly, Nizamud Din had prostrated himself before his elders; and secondly, his turban was completely made of cotton without a single silken thread, thus proving his simplicity and piety."

Young Muhammad was a mystic child. The constant prayers of the mother, the recitations of the holy *Quran* both by his *guru* Maulana Usuli and himself carried him in an altogether different world. The child had been thinking all

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the time of the invisible power of the Almighty God in seclusion and would try to explore Truth. One day he heard of the presence of an enlightened soul, Baba Farid. There was a thrill in the whole body and mind of young Muhammad who was at that time hardly twelve. He yearned to meet the great Saint. He collected details about the mystic Saint from the mystic musician who sang in praise of Almighty. It created a problem for the young one. How to meet the Saint? Auliya could imagine the intensity of the spiritual power of the man who could keep the whole atmosphere in the hamlet under the spell of spiritual pursuit. He simply did not know what to do? How to meet the great soul? The new dream of the child was only a meeting with Baba Farid. Nizamuddin would constantly remember the unseen hero of his heart and and his biographers tell us that "after each prayer he began to repeat the name of Baba Farid."

One must deserve divine power. Chances come on their own to one who deserves spiritual strength. One has to prepare himself for that. So it happened with Nizamuddin Auliya too. Just after hardly four years his mother decided to take him to Delhi for higher education. By then Nizamuddin attained good command over philosophical subjects in which he could deliver good speeches.

In Delhi Nizamuddin faced grim poverty. Because of his inherent abhorrence for materialistic gain, the young scholar had no means of livelihood and the family could not decide how to make both ends meet. The kind and deeply religious mother never lamented. Left to himself the young scholar perhaps could have become a teacher and run a school for children but the mother never diverted the attention of the child to any direction of material gain. She preferred hunger and refused to be a slave of mammon. She was the most befitting mother of an illustrious son. Both the mother and the son completely surrendered themselves to the heavenly Father and thought this was perhaps the desire of the Almighty. This was a forced process of austerity and Nizamuddin suddenly found himself one day an orphan in the big capital city of Delhi when the mother too left for heavenly home just out of simple privation. There was nobody to look after the lonely learned young boy. This was the next hurdle for Auliya to

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cross. Before she died the sweet mother performed a great act of sacrifice. She dedicated the son to God-Almighty.

Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya by now was fully qualified for the post of a *Qazi* but who would give it to him? How could he get it? He himself did not know and perhaps that was not to be too. His advisers too asked him to choose the better path. Nizamuddin Auliya became a *dervish*, a wandering monk. He thought to himself what a loss of energy for nothing: Why did he waste all these days? All these days he had been forgetting the ideal and the idol of his heart, Baba Farid. He at once set out for Ajodhan to meet Baba Farid.

This was a historic meeting: The ocean mingles with sea. Baba was waiting for him, it seemed. The Saint embraced his dear one.

Here is a detailed description of the meeting of the two master minds:

"He was welcomed with a great deal of honour and warmth by Baba Farid who offered him a bed in the *jamaat khana*. Nizamud Din was immediately initiated and his head shaved. This process was accompanied by gentle admonitions from Baba Farid suggesting that he should also lose the conceit he had developed as an *alim*. The Baba urged him to become fully involved in ascetic exercises on his return to Delhi. Fasting was the first half of the way along the *sufi* path, said the Baba and prayers and pilgrimages the other. On another occasion, Shaikh Nizamud Din asked the Baba whether he should exclusively devote himself to superogatory prayers by abandoning his studies but Baba Farid suggested that he should continue both as the two were necessary for the life of *dervish* and he would then see which would emerge as the most dominant.

Hazrat Nizamuddin was *sent* to Delhi mainly to spread the divine message of universal love—*dard*, compassion for mankind. But the restless mind would find no peace. He would long to taste the nectar that he had once with the preceptor. He would love to stay as long as he could with the Master. So soon Nizamuddin left Delhi and joined his *guru* Baba Farid at Ajodhan. This time he would concentrate on learning the Holy *Qoran* at the feet of the Master. Baba

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Farid himself taught Nizamuddin not only the six important chapters from the Holy *Quran*, he taught him some classic scriptures like the works of Abu Shakur Sulamil. He had to leave again for Delhi.

Nizamuddin met Baba Farid in 1257. He was just a young lad of nineteen. More than eight years had passed and not a day passed that Nizamuddin had not uttered the holy name of Baba Farid at least a thousand times with the prayers from *Quran*. Baba Farid sent for Nizamuddin Auliya from Delhi in summer 1265. He was given *khilafatnama* by Baba Farid. This was more than a convocation or initiation. This meant Nizamuddin Auliya also had the power of attorney to intiate anybody to the teachings of Baba Farid. On the happy occasion. Baba Farid said "You will be a tree under whose shadow the people will find rest. You should strengthen your spirit by devotion. I have handed over all these things to you for at the time of my death you will not be present." Nizamuddin Auliya's mission in life was to present to the lay men in Delhi the message of Baba Farid.

The Saint had no dwelling place in Delhi. He was living for some time with the relations of Amir Khusro. The relations were staying out of station. When they returned home it created a problem for the *Dervesh*. He shifted to a little village known as Ghiyaspur. Melons were available free in plenty. But how long do you get them? The rest of the year he could hardly get a single *chapati*. His face to face struggle against starvation made him a very perfect friend of the poor and the down trodden. Even when he got sufficient food later on as presents from hundreds of disciples, the Saint did not change his habit. He would take very little. "How can I take so much when so many people near my mosque are sleeping on the streets with empty stomachs?"

Hazrat Nizamuddin identified himself with his teacher's message of compassion, *Dard*. When his admirers once praised him for his deep learning and great popularity, the Saint opened his heart by saying "No one in the world is as sad and unhappy as I am. Huge numbers of people come to me and tell me of their misery and troubles. All this afflicts my heart and soul. Strange is the heart which listens to the sorrows of fellow brethren and is not touched by it. The

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dervishes who retire to the mountains or jungles are free of these problems."

The biographer of the Saint gives us some details about his close association with the poor. He says, "Shaikh Nizamud Din Auliya ate little when it was time to break his fast and again before dawn he ate sparingly when he began the day's fast. When pressed to eat more he would say with tears in his eyes that so many starving people slept in the corners of mosques and in the streets that these thoughts made it difficult for him to swallow food. Experience in dealing with all types of people endowed the Shaikh with a deep insight into human nature and his visitors were generally more than satisfied with his advice. In mystic language his inspired knowledge (*ilmi ladunni*) is recorded as greatly helping those who called on him. Even the *ulama*, notorious for their enmity towards sufis were amazed at his discourse, for Shaikh Nizamud Din was the master of the Sufi method of instruction by the use of anecdotes."

The Saint used to explain difficult things in a lucid manner. All great saints had been endowed with the gift of simple conversation for enlightening the masses. In the past Lord Buddha, Mahavira, Sankara, in modern period Sri Ramakrishna, had been attracting thousands of disciples and admirers who thronged to them in search of peace of mind. Like many religious preceptors of the past Nizamuddin did not like his disciples to concentrate on rituals. Even prayers and rituals were not so important as the uplifting of moral and ethical value in life. Nizamuddin Auliya would insist on repeating his favourite saying, "Whatever you do not like to be done to yourself, do not wish it to happen to other, wish for yourself what you wish for others also." To him service to man was more important than holding prayers.

Saint Nizamuddin's main message was compassion *Dard*. His main teaching to all was one must feel for others. One should always distribute his surplus things to the poor. The Saint introduced free kitchen-*Langer* to feed the poor, irrespective of their religion—Hindus or Muslims. The Saint drew large crowds—Hindus and Muslims of Delhi and people from far and near used to throng to his mosque just to listen to his learned discourse. He never distinguished between

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one religion and another. Nizamuddin Auliya Sahib also made it clear that is was not necessary, rather practically impossible for all to be ascetics. What was necessary was a higher value of life to be practised in our daily lives. "Forbearance and peaceful relations between people were qualities which the Shaikh constantly taught. Control of the baser aspects of a man's life was to be vigorously pursued. The animal soul was *nafs* and the human soul was *qalib*. *Nafs* was responsible for all evil whereas the *qalib* produced peace, resignation and good will. If a person was dominated by *nafs* a confrontation would culminate in evil."

"Family responsibilities which produced a nccessary involvement in worldly affairs were worthy and acceptable to the Shaikh who fully realized that few could become totally dedicated ascetics. But he opposed those who accrued money in excess of their needs. Those who supported their families were not really worldly, although they might appear so. Clothes were necessary to cover the body but spare ones were not to be hoarded. However, indiscriminate charity was extravagant, only charity to please God had spiritual merit." This is the universally accepted Indian tradition and culture. Nizamuddin Auliya represents the highest thoughts in Indian culture.

The Shaikh insisted on realised knowledge rather than on bookish one. He was convinced that a man could not get enlightenment unless he devoted himself to realise the Supreme Truth. Intellectual discourses and learned preachings have hardly any appeal to the seekers of Truth.

Like all great path finders, Nizamuddin Auliya was fond of mainly two things—the most beautiful and tender things in one's life, children and poems. He would like to fondle children because children are pure like unsmelt flowers and poems. Poems are creations of a good mind. He was exteremely fond of the poems composed by his most illustrious disciple, Amir Khusro. Amir Khusro used to serve the Master constantly and an appreciation by the *guru* was the highest recognition to him. He was the Court Poet to as many as eleven emperors of India but he valued the appreciation of the spiritual preceptor the most. His love for the *guru* has hardly any parallel.

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Who in India does not konw that the most illustrious disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya was Amir Khusro. The life of Nizamuddin Auliya cannot be complete without a reference to Khusro who was a creation of the Saint. The poet lived and died for the God-man. Amir Khusro is perhaps the first poet of Delhi who could leave a permanent mark in the history of Indian literature. He is better known in the literary circles of Delhi as *Tuti-i-Hind* (Parrot of India).

Undoubtedly Khusro is the father of modern Urdu literature. He composed the first poem in Hindi too. He is the pioneer of Hindustani literature. He had a facile pen and he wrote prolifically in all these three languages. He was a great scholar in Persian. And if we are to name any Indian literateur who could earn a name in Persian as a poet it is again Amir Khusro. It was again Amir Khusro who introduced *Sitar*- the fine string instrument. He was a pioneer of Indian classical music. As recorded by a contemporary historian Barni, "The incomparable Amir Khusro stands unequalled for the volume of his writings and the originality of his ideas; for while other great masters of prose and verse have excelled in one or two branches, Amir Khusro was conspicuous in every department of letters. A man with such mastery over all the forms of poetry had never existed in the past and may not come into existence before the Day of Judgment." Urdu was a language yet to flourish in its literary treasure. Just like *Prakrit* which was used by the masses when Sanskrit was the language of India, Urdu was used by the masses only as a spoken language. It was left to Amir Khusro to raise it to the level of court language and it was only Khusro who raised Urdu as a language of *elite* of Delhi. Before this it was the monopoly of Persian. The learned also used Arabic.

Delhi is proud of Khusro. Delhi is proud of Urdu. It was in Delhi that Urdu was born, nourished and flourished.

Amir Khusro was born in 1253 AD. During those days literature depended more or less on court patronage. The common man could hardly participate in the literary discussions. It was Amir Khusro, the poet of the people who had saved literary discussions from the monopoly of Persian. Khusro introduced a simple rhythm and rhyme to Urdu and popularised it in hamlets of the poor and the palaces of the rich. For the first time

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Khusro sang of the glory of the Indian people in Urdu, Hindi and Hindustani. Khusro's style has a happy blending of Persian melody, Hindi works and Sanskrit metres. They can be scanned as in the case of Sanskrit or English poems.

Like most of the poets in India, Khusro passed his childhood in utter misery. He was confronted with an odyssey of grim misery. He lost his father when he was hardly seven, His father Amir Saifuddin Mahmud was a favourite of the Emperor of India, Iltutmish. But when he passed away, Khusro was too young to be of any service to the King.

Maulana Saduddin took care of the child. Khusro was not much interested in studies. He would prefer muttering self composed rhymes. Sometimes he would even write down some of them on the slate. He used to be absorbed in his own creative urge. He was only afraid of the Maulana. He would compose the rhymes secretly, stealthily, without the Maulana's knowing about it.

The Maulana used to give full attention to the orphan child. One day the Maulana had to attend an invitation in a respectable family. The Maulana used to attend literary sittings invariably with one disciple or another. That day he took with him young Khusro. Khwaja Aziz Sahib, an eminent contemporary scholar, was also present there. Aziz was equally a poet of repute. But what made him more famous was his wide outlook and a kind heart.

All were busy in discussions. Young Khusro as a matter of habit, was muttering his self composed favourite rhymes. The dreamy eyes were kept absorbed in his own thoughts and the child did not even notice what was going on in the meeting. His thoughts were lost in the clouds. The Khwaja was observant. The boy was muttering something. His lips were moving. Aziz Sahib was noticing this boy for quite a long time.

The learned scholar got interested in the boy. He paid his full attention to the boy. The poets and scholars were left to themselves. The Khawaja could not check his curiosity. He patted the child and with a touch of affection asked him what he was muttering.

Khusro's guru the Maulana got perturbed. What an indisciplined boy. Muttering poems in a gathering like this!

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With much humility he told the learned Khwaja that it was more or less a habit with the child always to mutter something or the other within himself. *Gustakhi Maaf.* The toddler composes his own poems !

What Aziz Sahib was thinking was not far from truth. He was thinking on similar lines. He could recognise the gem at the very first sight. Aziz Sahib requested him to recite some of them loudly. For the first time Khusro recited four self-composed poems one by one.

The whole gathering was stunned. In one voice they welcomed the young poet. Aziz Sahib stood up in excitement, embraced the child and showered on him his blessings. In the history of Indian literature a new name was added—Abul Hassan *alias* Amir Khusro.

Kitlu Khan was the court poet of Ghiasuddin Balban. He too had a kind heart and wide outlook. It was a golden age of Indian history. As the spring is greeted by the twittering of birds so is an age welcomed by the songs of poets and sublime thoughts of philosophers. It was an age when Imadul Mulk, Maulana Saduddin, Khwaja Aziz Sahib, Kitlu Khan and above all the Saint Nizamuddin Auliya were all in Delhi.

Kitlu Khan was a saintly poet. He would give away to the guests whatever be had. Poets used to assemble at his *durbar* from distant places. He would welcome poets from Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Baghdad. Some came all the way from Khurasan, Turkistan. Kitlu Khan took great care of them. They would give away their best literary pieces. They would leave India with a heavy heart. They were simply charmed by the hospitality of the poet-host.

Saduddin left Amir under Kitlu Khan. By and by Amir came in touch with the royal poets. Balban's son Bugra Khan became a great admirer of Amir. He would arrange *mushairas* in honour of Amir Khusro where all the important poets used to be invited. One day he was presented with one big plate full of *mohurs* (gold coins) by Prince Bugra Khan. That enraged his *guru* Kitlu Khan so much so that he left the royal court. "What?" observed Kitlu Khan, "When I am supporting him and am still alive he accepts royal favour?"

The poet returned the royal present and asked pardon of his preceptor. But Kitlu Khan never changed his mind. So

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Amir took shelter under the prince who accepted him as an intimate friend.

Bugra Khan was killed by Timur who imprisoned also the poet. When released, the poet described the death of the prince in a long poem. The emperor fainted. The whole court was in tears.

Amir used to spend restless nights in search of truth. He had no earthly problems. According to traditions of the day he was given pearls and jewels equal to his weight but that did not help him to solve his real problem. For that he would sit at the feet of Saint Nizamuddin Auliya.

Amir Khusro was the court poet of eleven emperors of Delhi. Once the emperor Jalaluddin Khilji wanted to go to the prayer hall of the Saint secretly. The emperor did not admire him. He was jealous of his great popularity. Jalaluddin called the poet and disclosed his desire. It was to be kept a close guarded secret.

Amir was in a fix. What to do? On one side was the emperor, on another the preceptor.

He preferred to save the life of his *guru*. Risking his own life he disclosed this to the Saint. So when the emperor came to the hamlet of the *Peer*, he was missing.

The emperor was enraged. No third man knew of this royal adventure. So the poet was to explain. Very boldly he admitted everything.

"On one side is the emperor and on the other is the spiritual *guru*. If the king is angry the head will be off the shoulder. If the Saint is angry the whole spiritual force will vanish. I prefer the first," he replied.

Saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya was so much fond of the poet that before he passed away he told his disciples the following anecdote.

"You see when I go to heaven and *kurnish* the Lord he would ask me "Well Nizamuddin what have you brought for me from the earth? Then what shall be my reply?"

Some of the disciples shouted "Fragrant flowers."

The Saint nodded his head "No, no. I shall tell Him, I have brought for you a world famed poet whose heart is as clear as a diamond, a crystal clear piece. His name is Amir Khusro."

Amir Khusro composed poems for more than sixty years.

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During his life time of seventy two years (1253 AD to 1325 AD) as said earlier, the poet had the opportunity of serving as many as eleven emperors of India as their court poet. *Khazain*-ul-*Futuh* gives historical account of Ala-ud-Din Khilji's reign. *Tughlaq Nama* gives us an eye witness story of the reign of Ghiya-ud.Din Tughlaq. *Ashiqah* narrates a royal romance. He has noted with much care and pain some of the spiritual lessons of the Saint Nizamuddin Auliya. These conversations with the most enlightened soul of the age reveal the great reverence that the poet had for his Master.

In spite of so many important royal assignments, the poet would long to be in the company of the affectionate *guru*. When the great Saint passed away the poet was away from Delhi. On his return to Delhi with a broken heart the poet wrote:

"The fair one lies on her couch
With her black tresses scattered over her face;
O Khusro go home now
For night has fallen all over the world."

The night had really "fallen all over the world" and the poet could keep his promise. Within less than six months of the Saint's death the poet too joined him in other world! It is recorded "Amir Khusro was the most favourite disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya. The Shaikh loved him so much that he often used to say: 'I get tired of everybody, even of myself but never get tired of thee." His affection for Amir Khusro was so great that once he said that if religion had not prohibited it, he would have declared in his testament that he and Amir Khusro be buried in the same grave. He also used to say that he would not be able to enter paradise without Amir Khusro and that he would seek divine forgiveness by the spiritual fire which burned in the breast of this Turk. He had given him the pet name of *Turkullah* and usually addressed him thus. Only Khusro was allowed to remain with the Shaikh in his seclusion after the *Isha* (night) prayers. And so every day at that hour he was in communion with his master telling him all about the happenings of the day and drawing inspiration and strength for the day to come. He also gathered the

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many sayings and teachings of the Shaikh in a book called *Afzalul-fawaed*."

Both Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khusro reflected secular thoughts. Nizamuddin Auliya's philosophy has been so well depicted in beautiful poems by his foremost disciple. Amir Khusro says,

Nist Hindu archi ki dindar chamane
Hast bast jay ba qarar chuman

Though Hindu is not like me in religion, he believes in the same thing as I do."

In keeping with spirit of the *guru* Saint Nizamuddin Auliya, Amir Khusro writes;

Ay ki zi but tana ba Hindu bar!
Ham az way amuz parastishgari

O you who sneer at the idolatry of the Hindu learn also from him how worship is done.

It was one of the best periods of Hindu-Muslim unity. The presence of gigantic spiritual personalities brought a new vigour in Indian culture and philosophy. It was infusion of these fresh ideas that led the country in the next four hundred years to prepare herself for the *Bhakti* movement. It was a new synthesis.

In his famous *Nuh Sipihr*, Amir Khusro describes in details the great cultural heritage of India. He does it "in a deeply patriotic strain and looks back at the history and culture of this country as a part of his own tradition."

That was the spirit of the new *Sufi* Movement, with a great message of universal brotherhood of Man.

The spiritual successor of Nizamuddin Auliya was Shaikh Nasiruddin Mahmud who was popularly known as *Light of Delhi—Chiragh*. He was from a rich family, his father being an affluent wool merchant. He left all earthy luxuries when he was a young man of twenty five. He would spend days after days in deep meditation. He was one of the brightest saints of Delhi.

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Hazrat Nizamuddin lived for eighty seven years and saw the reign of several Sultans of Delhi, namely Ghyasuddin Balban, Muizuddin Kaikbad, Jalaluddin Khilji, Kutubuddin Khilji, Ghyasuddin Tughlaq and Mohammad Tughlaq. While most of these emperors were devoted to the Saint, two of them Kutubuddin Khilji and Ghyasuddin Tughlaq, at the instigation of jealous *ulemas*, turned against him. In trying to harm and humiliate him they met their own tragic ends due to the miraculous spiritual powers of the Saint. On account of his piety and spiritual attainments, the Saint earned the title of *Mahboob-i-Illahi*, "Beloved of God". The Saint maintained celibacy and remained a bachelor throughout his life. Like his illustrious father who refused the offer of *Qazi's* post, the Saint refused all royal patronages. He hated lust for gold and spurned a royal *jagir* offered by Alauddin Khilji.

About the spiritual power of the Saint there are many anecdotes. The most famous one is about the emperor Ghyasuddin Tughlak. The emperor built Tughlaquabad about five miles from the old city. It is on way from Badarpur to Faridabad. It was a well built city yet failed to attract people. There is a popular belief among the local people that the city was deserted due to a curse of the great Saint Nizamuddin Auliya. When the city was being built the Saint requested the labourers to dig a water tank for the benefit of the tired travellers.

The labourers were in a fix. What should they do? They had to listen to the Saint whom they loved but at the same time they could not ignore the royal order. They decided to build the city during the day and dig a water tank at night. It was near the prayer hall of the Saint. The construction of the city was delayed. Many workers even defied the order of the king's men. They refused to construct the big walls around the new city. Ghyasuddin was in Bengal and was told of the saint's immense populairty. He could not tolerate the defiance of the construction workers. He felt insulted. So the king himself led an army against the Saint. He had been warning the workers in advance.

The followers of the spiritual leader were in great worry. They did not know what to do. How will an unarmed poor God-Man stand the royal wrath? All the well wishers of the

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Saint advised him to flee away before the king returned. But it seems Hazrat Nizamuddin paid no heed to any of them. Completely unalarmed, calmly and quietly, he would only ask the workers to continue their work. He would simply smile and say *Dehli hanuz dur ast*—Delhi is yet at a distance.

Ghyasuddin came to Afghanpur, just one day's march from Delhi and the Saint's followers only started counting beads. They were sure the king would kill him. And yet calmly he would say *Dehli hanuz dur ast*! At Afghanpur a pavilion fell on the king and killed him. The Saint escaped his vengeance.

The new city of Tughlaqabad was soon deserted because the Saint had hurled his curse. He did not like the royal arrogance against common man's welfare. He said, "The city of Tughlaqabad will become an abiding place only for the jackals and the *Gujars*"! It came true.

The historic tank is still there near the shrine. Its water has great medicinal quality. The tank is a holy pilgrimage for millions.

The grave was just built by the Saint's admirers immediately after the Saint's death but the rest of the building was done later. There are marble arches surrounding the grave. They are simply charming. Akbar II built the dome. The tomb is just adjacent to the picturesque mosque built by Alauddin Khilji. This is known as *Jamaat Khana*. The Saint was very much fond of this mosque and chose this spot for his tank nearby. Shahjahan also built the marble screen, popular *jali* around the courtyard of the tomb. The work is very fine.

Many great personalities wanted to be buried near the Saint's tomb. Among them were Begum Jahanara, Amir Khusro, the great Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib and others.

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SAINT NAMADEVA

(1270 AD—1350 AD)

One of the greatest saints of Maharashtra, Namadeva hailed from the family of an ordinary tailor-cum-calico painter. He became a dedicated religious path-finder right from his youth after a tragedy in which he was involved in killing more than eighty persons.

India, the land of *Ramayana*, the land of Asoka the Great, has been the pioneer in spreading the message of peace. The exponents of these great messages had never preached anything without realising the inner meaning of their significance. They knew the value of peace at a very high cost.

It was nothing new. Asoka the Great, came to know what was meant by peace only after the ravage of Kalinga where thousands were killed in the battle. He was convinced of the utter uselessness of a war. Before Asoka, *Ratnakar*, highway robber who used to kill people in dense jungle just to earn his livelihood left the heinous criminal profession when he met a holy man who blessed him. The highway robber Ratnakar became a great Saint—Maharshi Valmiki—and wrote the epic *Ramayana* after attaining salvation. It is recorded that when the holy man asked the robber to utter the name of Rama the criminal could not do it. He was so sinful that the holy name would not come on his lip. So his *guru* asked him to utter repeatedly *mara* (meaning dead) which finally comes to Rama. '*Mara*' reads backwardly 'Rama'. The robber devoted himself so wholeheartedly to the new task that days, months and years rolled by and the fellow got completely covered by a hillock of white ant's citadel. When the holy man came to check the progress of the disciple he discovered this, got him released out of mound of white ants and saw the new glow of enlightenment on his face. He named him Maharshi Valmiki and gave him the task of writing the *Ramayana*. The highway robber became a saint. And one of the greatest. The heart

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has a reason. *The Cultural Heritage of India* records, "Any strong emotional attitude towards God is sure to prove fruitful in the effort of the aspirant to realise Him. Intense love, warm affection like that of an infant for its mother, great fear and even bitter hatred of God are all known to have been effective means of mystic experience. The emotion should be all-absorbing leaving no scope for any other emotion in the heart. There have been great devotees in Maharashtra, who might be cited as illustrations of all these different methods of God-realisation. Even the greatest sinners of enemies of God, the most confirmed atheists have been suddenly turned into great saints. It merely illustrates the psychological principle that strong emotion that invades the whole region of a person's consciousness drives away all other emotions. If such an emotion is deliberately developed, it has the inevitable welcome tendency of transmitting all other emotions, auxilliary or adverse. Though there are not many instances of conversion in the history of mysticism in Maharashtra yet there are some typical ones. The later spiritual life of Namadeva was the result of such a conversion."

(*The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV, pp. 368-69)

These are historic events—*Ratnakar*, the robber who turned into Maharshi Valmiki, Asoka, the great killer at Kalinga, who became Asoka the Great, Namadeva, the way-lay robber who turned one of the greatest saints of India—all created history. Their roles in the Cultural Heritage occupy a supreme one—each is important on merit.

Namadeva was born in 1270 A.D. in Pandharpur in the Sholapur district. His father Damaseta was a tailor by profession. His mother Gonabai was a highly religious lady. The ancestors of the Saint hailed from a little village Narasivamani, the modern name of which is Kalem Narasingpur in Satara district. Both the father and the Mother were deeply devoted to the family deity—*Govinda*. They never took their food without offering daily prayers.

The Saint was persecuted because of his low birth.

About the low birth of the Saint of Pandharpur a modern monk writes, "Often we hear, amidst the writings of the saints of Maharashtra, the echo that none by reason of castes,

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creed and by following a worldly pursuit shall be denied the gift of God-realisation. If examples are necessary look to Sena the barber, Kubja and Vidura the Sudras, Gora the Potter, Raidas the Cobbler, Savata the gardener, Narahari the goldsmith, Janabai the maid and Kanhopatra the dancing girl. Well did Chokha the untouchable bring out the point (when similarly condemned) in his inimitable style: a sugarcane may be crooked and yet its juice is not crooked; a bow may be curved and yet its arrow is not curved; a river may have windings and yet the water has no windings. Chokha may be an untouchable but his heart is not an untouchable."

Society was still very orthodox. So Namadeva had great difficulties even to enter the temple for his prayers because of his low caste. He gives vivid descriptions of his struggle in the *abhangas*. In one such song he laments the torture by the priests. He struggles to sing to the glory of God but he is thrown out because he did not follow the ritualistic drills as he hailed from a low family.

Hansata khelata taray dehuray aya
Bhakti karata nama pakara uthaya
Hinadi jat meri jadava raya
Chhipay kay janmo kahe ko aya
Lai Kamali challyo paltai
Dehurai pachoi bo tha jai
Jew jew nama Hari guna ucharoi
Bhakta jana koi dehura phiroi.

One day Namadeva with heart bubbling with devotion came to the temple of the Lord.

In his enthusiasm he forget all decorum and started his ecstatic dance before the Lord like a maniac. Irritated at the insolence, the Pujari pushed him out; Namadeva sore at heart complained, 'O Lord! You are responsible for my birth in a low caste which has brought all this insult on me.'

The Lord pleased with his devotee answered his prayer and turned round the frontal face of the temple.

Pleased with this act of the Lord, Namadeva started his song eulogising the Lord.

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All the worshippers who had witnessed the miracle bowed to Namadeva and sought forgiveness for their affront".

This great saint's name sake being very many sometimes it presents some confusion. Besides this Maharashtra Saint, there was another Namadeva who founded a sect and monastery in the District of Gurdaspur in the Punjab. The last Sayyid Alam Shah built a monastery of Namadeva and made an endowment for it in 1446 A.D. There was another Namadeva in Bulandshahar who was a calico-printer. Yet a fourth Namadeva was at Marwar who was a carder of cotton.

Even the *Gazeteer of India* confuses this great Saint from Maharashtra with the one from Bulandshahar who was a calico painter. Namadeva definitely did not belong to the group of cloth painter caste as mentioned there (Vol. II, p. 417).

The Saint himself has described in many *abhangas* that he belonged to a tailor's family and that he was all the time sewing with gold needle and silk thread the Name of the Lord.

Saint Namadeva was mainly responsible "for building up the glorious tradition of the school of thought known as *Varakari Sampradaya*. The most significant feature of his philosophy is "earnest and whole-hearted devotion to God."

To Namadeva, songs came spontaneously. He has composed innumerable *abhangas* giving descriptions of different aspects of his mental feelings, deep faith in God, his repentance for earlier crimes. These vivid descriptions are so captivating that none could imagine that Namadeva was an illiterate man. One of the *abhangas* of Namadeva tells us that he "led a very lawless life" in the beginning of his career. He was a marauder and is said "to have once killed a whole party of 84 soldiers. Shortly after this event when he went to visit the temple of Amvadhya, as was his usual custom he saw a woman rebuking her child who was crying because he had nothing to eat. The lady was constantly cursing the murderer of her husband. When Namadeva enquired the reason the woman told him that she was made a widow and the child an orphan because of her husband being killed among the 84 soldiers by a certain way-layer. Realising that the way-layer was no other than himself, Namadeva's heart was touched to the quick. He went inside the temple and in the fury of repentance struck his neck

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with a scythe and let loose streams of blood on the deity. The incident proved to be the turning point of his career." He went to Pandharpur and determined to lead a holy and pious life. The next few years were devoted to repentance and constant prayer.

After years of dedicated days of prayers, Visoba Khesara, *Nirguna Upasaka* initiated Namadeva. He convinced Namadeva of the all pervading nature of God. He went on pilgrimage with his younger contemporary Gyaneswara. Namadeva was a completely changed man. Many anecdotes are popular in Maharashtra about the Saint's feeling for the poor and the lonely. He was equally kind enough even to creatures. Those who knew him earlier and saw the cruel behaviour of the man and avoided him because of his ill manners were simply stunned by his new demeanour. How could it happen? His kindness was showered even to animals. He realised real truth and like an enlightened soul found the existence of God in everything.

According to a saintly scholar, "His severe *Sadhana* led him as if by light through the maze and wilderness of the world into the realm of Beatitude and as years passed on in penance, the gem of his life shown with splendour and brightness. His very acts became fragrant by the sublimity of their purity, charity and devotion. Who would not stand in adultation when he watches the action of Namadeva, (like unto the immortalised charity of the priest in *Les Miserables*) running with his pot of curd in his hands after the dog who had run away with his piece of bread, crying, pray partake of this also."

Namadeva was very much fond of the contemporary famous Maratha saint, Gyaneswara. Among them the two saints represented the highest in the intellectual and the emotional sides of contemporary spiritual life. There are all kinds of miracles told about Namadeva especially while he and Gyaneswara had gone on their famous pilgrimage. Even on his own, Namadeva had widely travelled. He is said to have spent a number of years in the Punjab in the village of Gheman in Gurudaspur district. There is a *Thakurdwara* which is believed to have been constructed by Namadeva. There is also a *Math* of Namadeva at Jwalapur, a village situated at a

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distance of about three miles from Hardwar. His *abhangas* are to this day sung by the people along with the hymns of the *Granth Saheb*. In fact some fifty to sixty of them are literally incorporated in the text of the Sikh scripture. One of the songs from *Guru Granth Saheb* is very much like highly philosophical pieces by Sankaracharya. Here the saint says that the whole life is nothing but *maya*. The only truth in the world is the existence of God Almighty. Namadeva writes:

"He is one (but) fills and encompasses many; whenever you look you find Him there. There is scarcely one who understands Him, all being deluded by the variegated picture drawn by *Maya*. Everything is *Govinda*, there is nothing without *Govinda*. Just as there is one thread and on it are woven breadthwise and lengthwise hundreds of thousands of beads, so is everything woven in the Lord. The waves, the foam and the bubbles of water are no different from water. All this extend of the universe is the sport of *Parabrahma* and, when we think of it, is not different from it. Illusive phantoms and the objects seen in dreams are regarded as real. When by the instruction of my *Guru* my mind awoke, I accepted the truth. Reflecting in your mind, see this all to be the creation of *Hari*, says Namadeva; in the inside of every individual, think there is one *Murari* alone without any interstice".

Unfortunately, no effort has yet been made to collect complete works of this great Saint. The songs are simply superb. They are complete dedications to the Almighty. "The most outstanding characteristic of his *abhangas* is their heart-rending yearning for God." Namadeva sings: "As bee's heart might be set upon the fragrance of a flower or as a fly might take resort to honey, similarly does my mind cling to God." The Saint had a melodious voice. He attracted huge gathering while performing *Kirtanas*. While in *Kirtanas* the saint sometimes used to faint in trance. The ecstasy would continue for hours. He would suddenly join the other devotee and start dancing in merry mood in the Pandharpur temple.

Namadeva was one of the earliest saints who discouraged discrimination on caste, creed or birth background.

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"Namadeva condemned caste polytheism and idolatry and pleaded for true faith sincerity and purity of life." He firmly believed in unity of Man. He never preferred ritualistic drills. He felt like contemporary *Sufi* Saints, any good man should believe in dedicating himself in two things: first, service to mankind and secondly, dedicating himself to God. This is possible through repeating the holy name. By uttering the holy name one gets tremendous power. The saint sings:

If you give me an empire what glory shall it be to me?
If thou cause me to beg how shall it degrade Me?
Worship God, O my soul and thou shalt obtain the dignity of salvation,
And no more transmigration shall await thee,
O God, Thou didst create all men and lead them astray In error;
He too whom thou givest understanding knoweth thee.

One stone is adored,
Another is trodden under foot
If one is a God the other is also a God
Saint Namadeva, I worship the true God.

Namadeva was very much disciplined in his spiritual approach. He was equally democratic in views. He had wide mass contact and emphasised the uplift of moral values of life. God cannot be seen or realised without purification of the heart, he insisted. The Saint observed that God can be realised through pure love. For the benefit of masses enlightening them to the divine path. Namadeva wrote hundreds of *abhangas* in a very simple and lucid style. One feels as if the Saint is just talking to the devotees. They narrate the different divine experiences of the Saint's own life and reveal realised Truth. They simply keep the audiences spell bound. His approach to Godlife is the simplest. He says in almost all his *abhangas* that man can realise God by the easiest path through repetition of his Holy Name. Later saints like Guru Nanak, Gouranga Mahaprabhu of the *Bhakti* era, Ramakrishna Pramahansa and Ramana Maharshi of the modern era, showed the same path to the ordinary people.

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Namadeva's *abhangas* today occupy a high place in the cultural life of the country. Most of these *abhangas* are clear description of his identification with God. As Ramaprasad identified himself with Mother *Kali* and described vividly his relation with the Goddess in his day to day life, so too Namadeva described his daily meeting with Lord *Govinda*. In one such *abhanga* the Saint says:

Kabahun khir khand gheebo na bhaboi
Kabahun ghar ghar tuk mangaboi
Kabahun kuran chane binoboi
Jew Ram rakhoi ticu rohiya rab bhai
Hari ki Mahima kichu kathama na jai
Kabahun bhum pai ar na paboi
Bhanati Namadeva ek nama nisataroi
Jiha Guru miloi tiha para utaroi.

The saint describes his every day routine and says he is indeed dumbstruck at the different ways of the Lord,

Queer are the ways of Lord! Some day He confers sweets on His devotee,
Whilst on the next day he gets not a farthing all day long.
And on the following day fall to his lot grains scattered on dust-heap.
Such is the glory of God and love of his devotee for Him, that he endureth all remains content and cheerful.
Some day He confers on him a caparisoned horse to ride,
Whilst on the next day he hath to trudge barefooted on the path he grudgeth not.
Some day a beautiful bed is spread for him and on the next day the bare earth is denied, yet the devotee rejoiceth in all that.
It is all the blessing of the teacher if one meets him.
Surely he crosses the cycle of rebirth.

This clearly describes the spirits of complete surrender of Namadeva to the Lord. Whatever is happening is only the will of the Lord. "Thy wilt be done"—as the Holy Bible says. Whatever the Lord wills will be done. Nobody has any choice

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there. The great invisible can be seen only through the kindness of the preceptor—the *Guru* who meets his disciple only at the right moment.

Like Sri Ramakrishna who would offer sweets to Mother *Kali* and would not leave the temple till she accepted it, Namadeva would offer milk to *Govinda*, "Accept this offering, O dear *Govinda*. Delay not". And what is more important is the description of the Saint of the acceptance of this offering by the Almighty. In an *abhanga* he confirms it. Namadeva says :

Sayan katouri amrita bhari
Lai namey Hari agay dhari
Ek bhakta merey hridaye basoi
Namey dekho Narayana honsoi
Dudh pibaya Namay ghar gaya
Namey Hari ka darshana bhaya.

Seeing this devotion of his Devotee Nama (in whose heart He dwells) the Lord *Hari* smiled and accepted it.

To the Lord it was verily nectar.
The Lord out of compassion moved by the lament and seeing the determination of His devotee Namadeva,
Set aside His hesitation and drank the milk;
Namadeva was very happy and with joy returned home.

The sayings of the saint have universal appeal:

"O man, why hast thou gone into the jungle of evil passions?
"Saith Namdev: Seek God's protection."

The Saint says again :

"Love is the magnet that draws His Heart;
By love may He be gotten and be held but by thought-never".
"When I sing of God then I behold Him;
Then I His humble slave obtain contentment."

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In another prayer he says:

"O my soul, thou hast been led astray by the pleasures of this deceitful world;
If thou should'st see the Supreme God, thou would'st have no other desire."

Yet in another hymn he sings:

"Abuse me well, O people! For my body and soul are for my beloved Lord.
"Now I know that having subdued the mind, I shall meet God with banners and music."

There are legends that Goddess *Kali* herself helped Ram Prasad to construct his thatched boundary of the hut (*bera*). The saint-poet has given description of it in his immortal songs. Here is another incident described by the earlier Saint. Namadeva sings:

One day in a conflagration Namadeva's hut was burnt,
The Lord Himself appeared and repaired it.
The beauty of the new thatched roof attracted the neighbours;
They offered Namadeva double the wages if he could build a similar one for them.
Namadeva answered. The builder of the thatched roof is my Lord *Hari*.
He accepts only love and complete surrender to Him as His wages and constructs it for a devotee.
He who renounces his family gives up the worldly possessions and all associations for His sake.
He rushes with a glee to him and offers him His embrace.
He is the omnipotent and omniscient Lord, who dwells outside and inside all creation.
It is very difficult to enumerate His exploits.
He is verily the body, soul and life of Namadeva and surrenders his all at His lotus feet.'

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Namadeva was an enlightened soul. He was shadowed by his deity. He saw his idol of heart wherever he had gone. He sings:

He is omnipresent and omniscient, whithersoever I cast my glances I see Him.
His illusive-power (*Maya Shakti*) is difficult to measure who gauge.
All is *Govinda*. From *Govinda* is all ! Nothing exists without *Govinda*.

This was all due to the kindness of Namadeva's *guru* Visaba. And in one *abhanga*, Namadeva admits it. "When the *Guru* gave me the torch of wisdom, the truth behind all creation revealed itself to me." Namadeva believes all men and manifestations of God. "I live in the creation of the Lord, always remembering and contemplating on the Lord *Murari* (Krishna) who dwells eternally in all."

Guru, according to the Saint, is the torch-bearer. Among the earthly colleagues he commands the highest reverence. Namadeva, too, gave *Guru* Visaba the highest tribute. Only through regular prayer and meditation a man gains a stage when he feels the constant presence of the Lord in one's heart. That is the final *Guru*, the inner soul, the *parama guru*. A human heart is the dwelling citadel of God Almighty. Namadeva says, "through the guidance of a spiritual Teacher, realisation became an easier task. Yet the fact that the external Teacher may take time to come for the disciple should be no reason to lose heart; for the Principal Teacher is the Inner One and He is inside oneself". The saint 'protested against mere rituals and ceremonies. He raised his voice of protest and with unflagging zeal fought with his life against such idle professional displays. Like the preceding saints, he preached the efficacy, of the recital of the NAME of the Lord and pointed to it as the sole way to emancipation from the miseries of the world. However, he emphasised the fact that the goal could be attained and *Bhakti* (devotion) realised only through contact and association with the saints. But he gives a definition of a saint which at one stroke excludes the vast galaxy of pretenders who pass under caption. Says he, "He alone is a saint who is able to

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show God". Of course, like others, Namadeva also describes their virtues and attributes in very much the same terms as does the *Bhagvad Gita*. Illustrating them with apt examples he says: 'They are like the trees who do not know honour or dishonour, who render shade and give fruits equally to those who cut them or serve them with sweetened milk. Unaffected equally by honour and dishonour, to them a piece of gold, a clod of earth, and the dungheap are of equal worth, or better of no worth at all."

The Saint could not forget the insult and the ill manner of the Brahmins at the temple because of his low birth in the family of a tailor. He is a tailor, never mind, his needle is of gold, he claims and perhaps rightly—

The Saint sings:
My mind is like unto the yard measure of the tailor
And my tongue serves as a pair of scissors.
I measure the cloth of life with the mind and cut it out by the tongue. Thus I am repeating His Name constantly.
I care not for my caste nor concern myself with my vocation with his Name. I dye the cloth and sew it with the needle of the Name.
I know nothing besides; my life's support is the Name of the Lord;
I perform the worship of the Lord and sing His praises.
I remember my Lord and Protector at all times and contemplate on Him;
Of Gold is the needle and of silver is the string,
With the concentrated mind, Namadeva sews with the Name of the Lord day and night.

With the gold needle he is constantly sewing by uttering the holy name.

Kaha karau jati kaha karau pati
Ram to nam japan dina rati

Why should I care for caste or creed? I utter the holy name of Ram day and night.

Sanay ki suri rupay kay dhage
Namay ka chitta Hari sew laga

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With the gold needle and silver thread I am sewing my heart with the idol of *Hari*.

This was very similar to Kabir who was a weaver. While weaving Kabir would compose songs and would completely get lost in it. Namadeva was a step ahead. He sewed all the time with a gold needle and silk thread.

Like the *Sufi* saints and all the later saints of the *Bhakti* era, Namadeva made the task of realisation of the divine touch easy by telling people that it is not necessary to follow the ritualistic drills. 'The stones float if you utter the name of Ram, why should you be surprised if you cross the ocean of *metapsychies* with the help of the Name of the Lord"? the Saint challenges the devotees.

Namadeva sings:

Did His Name not reclaim the libertine *Ganika*, depraved
Ajamil, the hunch-backed *Kubja* and the cruel hunter?
And did they not all secure salvation
Great is Sri Rama! all glory to His Name and obeisance to
Him!
How much does He not love his poor devotees' Sudama
and Vidura bear witness to His charity compassion.
Very hopeful is Namadeva that he will surely realise Him
for he is all three poor helpless and without piety to
his credit.

What is needed is constant prayer. Prayer can do mircales. Prayers give one tremendous spiritual force. By uttering the holy name and meditating on the Almighty an ordinary man may get supernatural power. What is needed is firm conviction. One must have full confidence in this mode of action as Namadeva had as a child. Once the parents who themselves were deeply religious and never took food without offering it to their deity were going on a pilgrimage. While leaving for the journey they asked the child to 'feed' God. You must not have your food before offering to God and see that He is not fasting' observed the devoted father and mother. It is said, child Namadeva offered milk and sweets to God. He took parents' instructions literally. He sat for hours before the deity. But there was no movement. Nobody was coming

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forward to accept his food. The child pleaded for long. Finally he became angry. He wanted to protest. 'The parents would get angry, better take it quickly, he repeated his prayer. Delay not dear. My parents will be angry with me.

Dudh pibo mero man pati ai
Nahi to ghar ko baap risai.

It so happened that the child's prayers came true. The food offered was accepted. The idol appeared before him in flesh and blood and shared the food. Not one day only. This happened till the return of parents from Varanasi. The parents could hardly believe the incident. This anecdote is a household story in whole of India in general and Maharashtra in particular.

There are many anecdotes of his miraculous power. The saint had four brothers. They lived in a joint family. Namadeva was a dyer painter.

They all used to work for the whole week on the eighth day they would go to market for selling their products. Namadeva once was delayed in his job. He got absorbed in meditation. So when he went to the market to sell his cloth, it had closed. He returned home and was rebuked by all. They had no knowledge of his spiritual power. He kept all his cloth-pieces outside the house and promised the family the cost on the eighth day. He covered each cloth with a stone. He brought one stone inside the house. On the scheduled day he gave that stone to his brothers. To the utter amazement of all it had turned to a piece of solid radiant gold. He asked them to deduct the price of all cloth-pieces and distribute the rest to the poor. Details are given in *Tales of The Mystic East* by Hazur Maharaj Sawan Singhji, pp 214-216.

Like all other Saints, previous and later, Namadeva had only one goal in life. That was to have the presence of the Lord before him all the time. He suggested the same to one and all. Nothing else is worth running after. Everything else is just transitory. Running after the wealth, pomp and show is nothing but foolish efforts to run after mirage. "All this is arrogance on your part. Why do you pride in this fleeting and idle show?"

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The one and the only target of a man's life should be to achieve God.

Always remember Sri Rama. He alone is eternal.
And His contemplation is the goal of Your life.
Entangle not yourself in illusion in this 'I and myness.'
It cost Duryodhana, the great Kaurava ruler, of unparalleled power, his life and his flesh was eaten by vultures.
To the same evil fate came Ravana the ruler of the Golden Lanka.
It does not behove you to revel in your elephants from which you have to part in a moment.
Even the great Rishi Durvasa had his vanity crushed by Lord Krishna.
If you desire to secure His protective hand and grace on you, sing His exploits night and day.

A philosopher has given a fine description of Namadeva's search for God. 'Namadeva awaits the arrival of the cloud of mercy in the heavens; in despair he entreats God to run to his rescue as does the mother whose child has fallen into fire." Namadeva is simply dying for God. His condition is like "that of a girl who is leaving her home for that of her husband for the first time or like that of a fish out of water."

Without this earnest longing for God, said Sri Ramakrishna, "none can realise Him. Enlightenment comes only to him who can call Him completely unreservedly."

Namadeva's main message is that man's only target in life is to realise God within. It is not possible to lead a worldly life and seek divine light. He says, "It is impossible," that the pursuit of God can be coupled with the life of *Samsar* (world). If it had been possible then Sanaka and others would not have grown mad after God. If it had been possible for him to see God while carrying on the duties of a householder the great Suka would not have gone to the forest to seek God. Had it been possible for people to find God in their homes they would not have left them to find God."

Without complete renunciation God-realisation is not possible. On this account Namadeva does not compromise with any relaxation. He must concentrate only on one. He

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has to forget everybody else. "I shall renounce all food and water, and shall think of nothing but God. I shall forget my mother, father, wife and children. I shall merge all body-consciousness in the Name of God."

One is reminded of Sri Ramakrishna when one reads Namadeva. Sri Ramakrishna repeated this quite frequently. He used to say that the skylark never touched any other water other than from rain. Similarly a goodman will seek only God and would not care for anything else.

He used to question, for your wife, for your father, mother and son you shed tears which will fill tubs. Did you ever care to shed even one drop of tear for God?

One cannot get God unless one's heart burns in great anguish for the separation from God. To quote a saint who has described Namadeva's pang of separation from God, "The passage through the Dark Night of the Soul like that of the Christian mystics and mediaeval Indian saint is marked by a heart rending wail. In his *abhangas* he described faithfully this burning thirst for the Lord and the ultimate divine benediction followed like the down-pour from the clouds of His mercy. But before the dawn of such blessed a moment he had to pass through experiences fraught with melancholy, grief, sorrow and bleeding of the heart."

Dr. R.D. Ranade in his "*Mysticism in Maharashtra*" describes the complete change in Namadeva. By quoting the Saint himself he observes, "In the midst of the consciousness that the main portion of his life had been ill spent, this saint fully believed in the overflowing mercy of the Lord and with confidence and faith he asserted: 'from top to toe I have committed innumerable sins. Do you think I shall grow weary and go away from your presence feeling that you would not come? The rope of my life I shall bind to Your feet and shall bring you to me at pleasure shall spread the meshes of my love and catch you alive. I shall beat You with the voice of self-identity and then you shall surely ask for compassion, your generosity has been falsely praised. You give only when you have taken away".

Dr. Ranade describes Namadeva as a "democratic mystic Saint."

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The Saint passed away at the age of eighty in 1350 AD.

Namadeva left a rich tradition of spiritual pursuit. The impact was fully felt during the *Bhakti* movement. Among those saints who drew direct inspiration from the *abhangas* of Namadeva, mentions are found in the songs by among others, Kabir, the most outstanding figure of the *Bhakti* era. Referring to Namadeva's contribution to the Cultural History of India, scholars pay glowing tribute to the Saint. The simple beautiful verses of Namadeva and Tukaram (Seventeenth century) are full of "piety and devotion and they have acquainted wide celebrity far beyond sectarian limits." (*Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV, p 60).

"Busy thy hands and feet in work, but give thou thy mind to God, sayeth Namadev."

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AMIR KHUSRO

(1253 AD –1325 AD)

The most striking feature of Indian literature is that Her poets, in all the regional languages, have always created the literature fired by divine inspiration. And the most important of them never had any ambition to be a poet. It was not in one or two languages. It was in almost all Indian languages.

In Punjabi Baba Farid and Nanak spoke in poems. They are the beginning of Punjabi literary heritage. In Gujarat Narsi Mehta and Meera Bai sang songs to the glory of Ranchchodji. They were the beginning of Gujarati literature. In Kashmir Lalleshwari and Nand Rishi (Shaikh Nurud Din) sang to the glory of God in Kashmiri, that was the beginning of Kashmiri language and literature. In Karnataka, Purandara Das sang spontaneously in Kannadese. Thousands of songs to the glory of Lord Hari are attributed to him. Saint Thyagaraja sang in Tamil. Some of the sweetest songs in praise of Ramachandra. A few thousand of them are in circulation just month to month. He had no intention to become a poet. In Bengal, Saint Ramprasad composed hundreds of songs in praise of Mother *Kali* just spontaneously and enriched Bengali literature. Saint Kabir, Saint Surdas, Saint Tulasi Das all composed songs in Hindi in praise of Sri Ram. They had no intention to become poets. The first Assamese Saint poet Sankara Dev composed songs in praise of the Lord in Assamese. Jayadeva composed songs in Sanskrit spontaneously on the Lord. Vidyaptai and Chandidas composed songs in Maithili in priase of Madhava, God. All were inspired poets. There is no country in the world whose cultural heritage is so much blended with divine touch. Urdu, the rich language of India was also born in the soil in exactly in a similiar fashion.

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A close associate of the great sufi Saint Khwaja Nizamuddin Aulia, the versatile Saint musician Amir Khusro introduced a number of new items in the cultural heritage of India.

Although a man of letters, a court Poet and one who specialised in war strategies, Khusro is known in the cultural history as a great saint: Every year *Urs* is celebrated by both Hindus and Muslims at his mausoleum in Delhi in Nizamuddin complex towards the end of May with full dignity and grace that a religious path finder commands.

Khusro belonged to Delhi. He flourished in Delhi. He meditated in Delhi. He died in Delhi.

The Saint had spiritual inclination right from birth.

While yet a boy Khusro became a disciple of the great Sufi saint and mystic, Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia. This was a life-long association which had a far-reaching influence on the ideas of the poet. He was deeply attached to his master. While away in Bengal he learnt of the saint's illness and rushed to Delhi but unfortunately not before the great saint had died. This gave him a tremendous shock from which he could not recover and died within five months of his master's demise.

He was buried near the grave of Hazrat Nizamuddin ! In 1605 A.D. Tahir Beg, a nobleman, built a mausoleum over his grave. It is a holy pilgrimage for all. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists pay their homage for the brightest secular thoughts of the versatile Scholar Saint Poet.

His early childhood is equally interesting.

Abul Hasan, better known by his *nom de plume* of Amir Khusro was born at Patiali in the Etah district of Uttar Pradesh in 1253 A.D. (651 A.H.). He came of Turkish stock, his father, Amir Saifuddin Mahmud having fled before the Mongols from the Balkh region came to India. At the age of four he went to Delhi with his father who joined the court of Sultan Shams-ud-din Iltutmish. During the seventyone years of his life Khusro witnessed the rise and fall of three ruling dynasties—Slave, Khilji and Tughlak—and personally enjoyed the patronage of several successive rulers of Delhi.

Khusro first entered service as companion-attendant to King Balban's son, Mohammad, who was very fond of the the company of the learned. Besides being a celebrated poet

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and master-musician he was a soldier and man of action. He took part in many campaigns of which he has given account in his works.

Amir Khusro wrote profusely. He was a versatile genius. Ziauddin Barni, the famous historian, has attributed over ninety works to him besides four *diwans* in Persian. Some of his well-known works are: *Matla-i-Anwar*, *Eijaz-i-Khusravi*, *Khaliq-i-Bari*. *Anasir-i-Khusro*, *Khazaen-ul-fatuh* and *Masnavi Tughlaknamah*. Besides these he wrote hundreds of couplets in Hindi, Arabic and Turkish.

Amir Khusro recognised the high literary merit of Hindi. In his poem *Ashiqa* , he speaks of the richness of the Hindi language. Making a comparative estimate of Arabic, Persian and Hindi, Khusro worte:

"But I was in error, for if you ponder the matter well, you will not find the Hindi words (Language) inferior to the Parsi (Persian). It is inferior to the Arabic, which is the chief of all languages. The prevalent languages of Rai and Rum (cites in Persia which Elloit wrongly writes as Rai and Rum), I know from reflecting well on the matter, to be inferior to the Hindi. . . . . .the language of Hindi is like the Arabic, inasmuch as neither admits of combination. If there is grammar and syntax in Arabic, there is not one letter less of them in Hindi. If you ask whether there are the sciences of exposition and rhetoric, I answer that Hindi is in no way deficient in those respects. Whoever possesses these three languages in his store, will know that I speak without error or exaggeration" (Elliot : History of India III, Appendix, p. 556)

Amir Khusro was no less noted as a musician than as a poet. He is credited with having introduced *Khayal* into Indian music and invented the now well-known instrument "Sitar", which is a simple contraption of the classical "Veena". Besides he composed many songs and sonnets.

Literature and music during those days depended on more or less on court patronage. The common man could hardly taste its flavour. It was left to the Saint Poet Amir Khusro to give the cultural lead. As poet of the people he saved literary discussions from the monopoly of Persian as the later *Bhakti* era saints saved it from the limited circulation in Sanskrit. Amir Khusro introduced a simple rhythm and

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rhyme to Urdu and popularised it to hamlets of the poor and the palace of the rich. For the first time Khusro sang to the glory of the Indian people in Urdu, Hindi and Hindustani. Khusro's style has a happy blending of Persian melody, Hindi wordings and Sanskrit metres. They can be scanned as in the case of Sanskrit or English poems. Amir Khusro was the founder of Hindustani music. This had introduced a new blend of the touch of Persian and Arabic musical instruments. It changed the very basic structure of Indian music. He did not do it with an object of moulding the Indian music in the pattern of the land of his origin. He did it spontaneously as is always done by great man. He had little feeling of allegiance to Persia once he settled in India. He was conscious if it and made it clear in his writings. The Saint Poet and Musician has written, "I am an Indian, even if a Turk. My lyre responds to the Indian theme."

Of course the main trend remained the same. It was common to both North and South India. The names of the *ragas* remained the same but the corresponding content varied in each case "in the intonation of notes and the execution of graces (*gamakas*) stylistic divergence arose; so too, in the method of elaborating and expanding a *raga*." After Amir Khusro the Hindustani School "began to observe strictly a time theme *of ragas*, which has some justification."

Ragas came to be classified "in different ways in the two systems. The North took six *ragas* as primary and also arranged them on the analogy of a family relationship—husband, wife, sons and daughters".

Khusro was a prince among patriots and accepted Indian culture as his own. It is recorded in many of his master pieces how the Spirit of Indian Culture fascinated him. In his masterly *Nuh Sipihr*, the Saint "refers to the historical heritage of India in a deeply patriotic strain and looks back at the history and culture of this country as a part of his own tradition."

The Saint was a versatile genius. It is truly observed in History of Indian Culture that "His five diwans, four historical mathnawis and two prose works throw light on the political topographical, social and cultural aspects of life. His works especially *Miftah-ul-Futuh*. *Khaza-in-ul-Futuh* or *Tarikh-i*

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Alai (in prose) and *Tughluq Nama* (poetry) contain valuable information on the political history of the reigns of Ala-ud-din Khalji and Ghiyasuddin Tughluq."

Amir Khusro was popularly known for his liberal outlook to religion. He was himself an ardent Sufi. But it did not restrict him to the orthodoxy of thoughts. He believed in oneness of divinity and was of the view that for both Hindu and Muslim devotees the goal was the same—God-realisation.

Amir Khusro wrote thousands of songs and expressed freely the message of Hindu Muslim unity. In this sense he contributed, more than anybody else, to the maximum in a harmonious approach to unity of thought. He was one of the pioneers of secular thinkers.

Nist Hindu archi ki dindar chu man
Hast bast jay ba qarar chu man

Though *Hindu* is not like me in religion, He believes in the same thing as I do. In another important piece the Saint writes.

Ay ki zi but tan'a ba Hindu ban'
Ham az say amuz parastishgari

O you who sneer at the idolatry of *Hindu*. Learn also from him how worship is done. Although Khusro did not believe in idolatry himself he had no abhorrence for it. He encouraged it as a discipline. Himself a great scholar the Saint could appreciate that to the lay men idolatory was necessary to generate concentration of mind. From ignorance comes knowledge. So a person immediately may find it difficult to concentrate on *nirakar*, let him worship *Sakar*. He can jump to *nirakar* step by step.

The Saints' main contribution was contact with masses through an easy literature:

Amir Khusro is perhaps the first poet from Delhi to leave an imprint in Indian literature. He is known in the literary circles of Delhi as Tuti-i-Hind, or the song bird of India. The literal translation of 'Tuti' would be 'parrot'. But the parrot

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is not exactly connotative of the creative faculty in the English language!

Khusro is the father of modern Urdu literature. He composed the first poem in Hindi too and he is also a pioneer of Hindustani literature. He wrote a tremendous amount in all the three languages. In addition, he was a scholar in Persian and wrote fine poetry in that language. And it was again Amir Khusro who introduced the Sitar to India—the fine stringed instrument now became a symbol of psychedelic India in the West. Barani said of him, "A man with such mastry over all the forms of poetry has never existed in the past and may not come into existence before the day of Judgement."

In Khusro's time the Urdu language had yet to come to literary reckoning and fruition. He gave it the polish, suavity and refinement necessary for becoming a court language. Once it became that, it was adopted by the elite, for whom the languages so far had been Arabic and Persian. Delhi is proud of Khusro. Delhi is proud of Urdu. It was in Delhi that Urdu was born and nourished.

In his days literature depended more or less on court patronage. And the common man had no place in literary discussions. Khusro saved the literary life of the day from being browbeaten by Persian and a remote culture. He introduced a simple rhythm and rhyme to Urdu and made it apt for the hamlets of the poor as well as for the halls of the rich. For the first time in history the glory of the people was sung in dignified and yet earthy dialects in Urdu, Hindi and Hindustani. His poetry has a happy blending of Persian melody, Hindi words and Sanskrit metre. It can be scanned like Sanskrit and English poems.

As did most of the poets in India, Khusro passed his childhood in misery. His father died when he was not yet seven. His father Amir Saifuddin Mahmud was a favourite of Iltutmish, the ruler then. When his father died Khusro was too young to be of any service to Iltutmish. Maulana Saduddin took care of the child. Khusro was not interested in studies. He preferred muttering to himself self-composed rhymes in place of his catechism. Sometimes he would even write down these rhymes on his slate. He was happy and self-sufficient

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with his creative faculty. He was afraid of the Maulana and composed his rhymes in secret.

The Maulana gave full attention to the orphan child. One day the Maulana had to attend the literary meet at a family of standing. He usually took along a disciple to these meets. This time he took Khusro. Among the invitees was Khwaja Aziz Sahib, an eminent contemporary scholar and poet. The discussions were going on and young Khusro, true to his habit, was muttering his own rhymes. His eyes were abstracted. He did not know what was going on a round him. The Khwaja was curious. He tapped the boy on his shoulder and asked him what he was muttering. Khusro's guru, the Maulana, got perturbed. What an indisciplined boy, muttering thus at an illustrious gathering! He said to the Khwaja that it was an unfortunate habit of the boy. 'Gustakhi Maaf', the toddler composes his own poems. Aziz Saheb asked for some of them to be recited. For the first time Khusro recited four poems of his own, one by one. Aziz Saheb stood up in excitement. He embraced Khusro, showered blessings on him. To the gallery of Indian literature a new name was added, he said: Abul Hasan alias Amir Khusro.

Kitlu Khan was the court poet at the time. It was an age—a golden age—when Imadul Mulk, Maulana Saduddin, Khwaja Aziz Sahib, Kitlu Khan and above all, the mystic, Nizamuddin Auliya, were all in Delhi. Kitlu Khan was a saint-poet and a giver. He gave away all that he had. Poets came to him from Egypt, Thailand, Iraq, Baghdad, Khurasan, Turkistan. Kitlu Khan took good care of his guests who gave the best of their poetry.

Maulana Saduddin left Khusro with Kitlu Khan. And, gradually, Khusro came in contact with court poets. Balban's son Bugra Khan became a great admirer of Khusro. He arranged mushairas in honour of Khusro. And once he presented his protege with a plate of gold coins, Kitlu Khan was enraged. His saintliness deserted him. He, Kitlu Khan, was the patron and protector of Khusro. How could he accept royal favour? Khusro returned the presents and begged forgiveness. But Kitlu Khan could not forgive. Khusro took refuge with a prince who accepted him as an intimate friend. Bugra Khan was killed by Timur who imprisoned the poet too.

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When released, Khusro described the death of the prince in a poem. Balban fainted. The court was shaken.

Khusro spent restless, insomniac nights in search of truth. He had no material problems. In keeping with the tradition of the times he was given gold and silver equal to his weight. He sat at the feet of the saint Nizamuddin Auliya in search of a solution to his queries.

Khusro was the court poet of eleven rulers of Delhi. Once Jalaluddin Khilji wanted to go to the prayer chamber of Nizamuddin Auliya. Khilji did not admire Auliya. He was jealous. He wanted to kill the saint. He sent for Khusro and told him what he wanted. Khusro was in a fix. What was he to do? The king on one side, on the other, his preceptor. He preferred to save the life of his guru. At the risk of his own life he forewarned the saint. When Khilji came to the prayer chamber of the pir, he was not there. Khilji was enraged. No third man knew of his intended visit. So the poet had to explain. The poet said: "If the king is angry my head will be off the shoulder. If the saint is angry the whole spiritual harvest will vanish. I prefer the first."

Before the death Nizamuddin Aulia told his disciples the following story:

"You see, when I go to heaven and the lord, he asks me, "Well Nizamuddin, what have you brought for me from earth?' What shall be my reply?"

Some of the disciples chirped up: "Fragrant flowers".

The saint shook his head. "No, no I shall tell Him, I have brought for you a poet whose heart is as clean as crystal. His name is Amir Khusro."

When Auliya died Khusro was away from Delhi. On his return he wrote:

The fair one lies on her couch,
With her black tresses scattered
over her face:
O Khusro, go home now
For night has fallen all over the
world.

In less than six months Khusro joined Aulia in the other world.

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GYANESWARA

(1275 AD—1297 AD)

Gyaneswara hailed from an illustrious family of Maharashtra. His grandfather Govinda Rao and great grandfather Trimbakpant were devoted disciples of the great mystic saint Natha. His father Viththalpant was a highly spiritual person. The mother Rukhumabai was the daughter of Siddhopant of Alandi and was well known for her religious pursuits. Both the parents spent most of their time in religious activities. The father was not only learned but a realised soul who had no fascination for earthly life.

Both the paternal and maternal lineage had deep religious leanings. It was no wonder that the family of Viththalpant became almost a mini ashram in Maharashtra. The little village Apregaon in the district of Ahmednagar has today become a holy pilgrimage.

It was a centre of not only religious activity. It attracted a large number of brilliant people who devoted their lives to learning and spreading the message of equality and brotherhood of man.

All the brothers of Gyaneswara and his sister became medicants and spent their lives in God realisation.

It is an interesting story. In their holy atmosphere of divinity was born in the year 1275 A.D, one of (greatest Saints of India, the enlighted Gyaneswara, also known as Jnandev was the second son of Viththalpant and Rukhminibai. Both the parents were equally devoted to God. Once Vithalpant felt the deep urge of renunciation and without telling anybody he left stealingly the little village on the bank of the Godavari and reached Varanasi on the bank of the Ganga. But the journey did not complete the drill. From Godavari to Ganga or from Maharashtra to Varanasi on foot was not an easy task. He must get a *guru* who could quench his spiritual thirst.

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The *Bhakti* movement was just beginning. The great *guru* of a band of the leaders of the movement Ramananda had been the most famous among the teachers. Viththalpant fell at the feet of Ramananda, became his disciple and took to *Sannyas*. Rakhumabai was not an ordinary lady. She reached Varanasi and by "heartfelt supplications moved the great *Guru* and brought back her husband.

The Brahmins were very interfering types. Although it was nobody's business to make any protest against the personal decisions of Viththalpant, the poor man was not spared by these begotted creatures. He was incommunicated by his relations. These selfish people must have thought of the limited property and were afraid of the due claim of the monk on his own share. The same thing had happened when Sankaracharya had gone to perform the last rites for his mother. They did not come forward to help the monk to carry even the dead body. They were so jealous of his return.

Viththalpant was put into great difficulties. The poor saintly learned man literally begged of every Brahmin to perform the sacred thread ceremony of the three children. He was prepared to do any sort of atonement.

Society was cruel. None would listen to him. He did not commit any crime. He was a learned saintly brahmin who went on his own to Varanasi on a pilgrimage. He liked to embrace *Sannyas*. He left everything and joined monkhood. What business the orthodox brahmins had to stand in a row to ridicule him when he returned home. He had no intention to come home.

As directed by the Guru, Viththalpant led the life of an ideal householder. He had three sons Nivrithinatha, Gyanadeva and Soparadeva. He had an equally illustrious daughter Muktabai. These four are equally respected even today as forerunners in rejuvinating spiritual life in Maharashtra and are "rightly regarded as the pride and glory of Maharashtra", nay of India.

All the four had to face great hurdles by social "leaders". Because Viththalpant had renounced the world, embraced *sannyas* and returned home the entire family was excommunicated by the Brahmins. As the cultural Heritage of India records, "they had to suffer terrible persecution at the hands of

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society. Viththalpant was asked to go round the holy mountain Brahmagiri near Tryambakeswara, with his children. While he was undergoing this penance, he was frightened by a tiger. Nivithinatha, the eldest son entered the cave Gahininatha for protection from the tiger and he was blessed by the latter there. In due course he rejoined his father and brothers in their penance."

(Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV—Page 357)

It is recorded even after Viththalpant went away to Nasik with his wife and children, the social persecution remained unabated. The whole family was the subject of hatred and constant humiliation and the orthdox people continued jeering at them. It is recorded with grim sadness that "the parents of Jnandeva had to end their lives by committing suicide in the river Godavari." Professor Dandekar however says "when Viththalpant approached them with a request not to be too harsh with his sons, they (the brahmins) suggested that he and his wife, Rukhminibai, drown themselves in the holy confluence of the Ganges and the Jamuna at Prayag as an act of atonement. Viththalpant accordingly went to Prayag accompanied by his wife and atoned for his sin.

The four helpless children were simply stranded. "When the orthdox Brahmins refused to perform the sacred thread ceremony of Jnanadeva and his brothers, the four children went to Paithana to obtain a certificate of Suddhi from the Brahmins of Paithana which was then regarded as a very orthodox centre". The two wisemen of Paithana Hemalpant and Bopadeo refused to issue the necessary certificate on the ground that only a high class brahmin was entitled to study the *Vedas*. This incident is associated with the first miracle that Gyaneswara had shown.

Gyaneswara is known as Jnanadeva. The exact Marathi spelling is Dnyanadeo. Recording this incident the biographer of the Saint, Prof. S.V. Dandekar says, "Dnyanadeo, his two brothers Nivrithi and Sopan and sister Mukta thereupon wended their way to Paithan. Paithan Brahmins were not too eager to welcome these outcaste children and were persuaded to listen to their plea only after Dnyanadeo amazed them by

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his spiritual powers. It is said that in a philosophical argument, Dnyandeos claim of equality for all Gods' creatures was countered by an opponent by pointing to a he-buffalo standing in the street nearby and challenging Dnyandeo to make it chant the hymns of the *Vedas* like a learned brahmin. It was no sooner said than done. The buffalo perhaps put to shame many of his listeners, who were not so prompt or ready with their vedic recitations. But the display of this miraculous power by Dnyanadeo was an overwhelming proof of the brahmin purity of these children who asked for nothing more than a certificate to that effect. The Paithan brahmins declared that Dnyanadeo and his brothers needed no certificate of any kind and were as good brahmins as themselves."

The news of this miracle by Gyaneswara spread like wild fire. People came in hundreds to see him. Gyanadeva addressed them and explained to them the true message of *Bhagwad Geeta* in a popular style. His lectures became very popular and people thronged the meetings in thousands. All the equally talented brothers and sister stayed at Paithan for sometime. Therefrom the little party left for their home town. On way they stopped at Newase, a small town on the bank of the Prawara, in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. It was here that the saint composed his most illustrious *Gyaneswari* or *Dnyaneshwari*, "an original unparalled and immortal commentary on the *Bhagwad Geeta* in Marathi. The commentary was written in 1290 A.D, when the saint was hardly fifteen. According to *Cultural Heritage of India* "the *Jnaneswari*, written about A.D. 1290, is a very original commentary on the *Geeta*, which deserves to be reckoned among the world's best mystical compositions." (Page—357)

The saint was an incarnation of humility. At the end of his immortal *Gyaneswari* he writes "now that the chant of this glorious work is completed befor ye saints, I seek the shower of grace by you on me, your servant, who has dealt you with such a pleasant divine dish. I pray also that those leading the wayward life may be brought to the right path and the Divine Light may shine in the path of all devotees." Without humility and reverance for the *Guru* none can attain God-realisation. The way to his success was his "indomitable faith in the grace

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of God. He believed the grace of the Lord comes by meditation on the *Guru*."

This reminds one only of the *Vaishnava* humility of Ramanuja, Chaitanya or the great Masters who never gave any impression of ego. They time and again insisted that they had not done anything. They have done everything as they were made to be done by the Almighty.

Gyaneswara opened a new gate to heaven to the masses who had no access to the original scriptures. The Marathi version of this "epic" has ever since been translated into so many languages. The versatility of the young saint are seen in each commentary.

He actually led thousands to the "right path" and placed before them the "Divine Light." The devotees enjoyed this nectar and led themselves to "Life Divine." In brief, *Gyaneswari* is "a Marathi commentary in verse on the *Bhagwad Geeta*. It consists of about 9,000 *Ovis*. It is characterised by independence of thought brevity of expression, clarity of exposition, lucidity of style and an abundant use of rhetorical figures such as simile, metaphor, dialogue.

Gyaneswara himself says in the introduction "I shall explain every word in the *Bhagwad Geeta* with selected words and with an abundant use of rhetorical figures like simile and metaphor."

The saint says "By this attempt of mine, let the want of self-knowldge be removed. Let the need of every one who wants to experience this infinite stone of spiritual joy be met."

Gyaneswara says, "Let the city of the Marathi language be filled with exceeding plentifulness of spiritual knowledge, so that the merchandise of happiness will be cheap and customs in this market will give and take any amount of happiness they want."

Prof. Dandekar rightly observed, *Gyaneswari* "Still remains unparalleled on account of the lucidity of language, beauty of its expression, depth of its thought and the high motive behind the undertaking." What was the motive behind this great work? Gyaneswara got enlightenment. He studied all the *vedas* and realised knowledge and divine bliss. It was not possible

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for all to study the original *vedas*. To quote the learned saints own words, "the *vedas* are certainly rich in knowledge but they are extremely niggardly. They have restricted their use only to the higher classes. Against the rest (who are infinite in number) they have closed their doors. But it appears that the *vedas* later on realised their error and to remove it they assumed this form of *Bhagwad Geeta*. So now in this form the *vedas* have become available to all."

Clearly there were two motives. He wrote in a language which would be understood by all Marathi knowing people. All were not permitted to study the *Vedas*. For instance, there was objection in his own case by the orthdox Brahmins. He wanted to unfold the Truth of God realisation before one and all. He wanted the world to be blissful.

Gyaneswara writes, 'I want to fill the whole world with divine joy. I have selected the simplest of metres,—the *ovi* metre—because it is easy of apprehension to all even to children or youths." Ovi is as simple as *payar* metre in Bengali language in which the popular *Ramayana* and *Mahabharta* are written by Kirtibas and Kashiram Das.

There is nothing in Indian philosophy which has not been discussed in *Bhagwad Geeta* which teaches "a philosophy of God realisation. It is, therefore, *Adhyatma Shastra*, a book of mystical experiences." Gyaneswara was "a magnanimous soul anxious to bring happiness to the whole world. And in that high souled nature lay the urge of his *Gyaneswari*. Gyaneswari contains the quintessence of Gynadeva's philosophy of life. It is a book which gives his speculative doctrines, his views on mystical experience and moral life." The impact of Gyaneswari in the spiritual life of India has been tremendous. It has been truly observed, "It has captivated the hearts of the people. Even after six hundred years, its fascination has not lessened, rather it is growing. Its impression upon Maharashtra is profound. Dnyaneswari towers above the writings of all other Maratha saints in influence in attractiveness and in its impact on Maharashtrian character.

He was a real, preceptor for whole of Maharashtra. In his own words "where there is a saint, there must be discriminative knowledge." Only from a spiritual preceptor can enligh-

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tenment be obtained." Who was more enlighened spritually in whole of Maharashtra than Gyaneswara?

Gyaneswara says, in Gyaneswari, 'I am building the temple of bliss for world."

In his personal life Gyaneswara's success to God realisation was through his attachment to his friend, philosopher and guide—the *Guru* whom he respected as an incarnation of none less than Lord Viththala."

"The service of the teacher is the gateway to realisation—separation for a moment from him for me is like the length of an age—a difficult time to pass. I meditate on my *Guru* with love and yearn to serve him bodily with all my heart and soul . . . I pray I could serve him by becoming the spittoon in which he spits; I yearn to become the very air of the fan he uses; I wish to become the clod of earth of the passage on which fall his feet as he goes for his devotion to the temple . . . I long with my soul to perform his *Arti* (service with candles) . . . In life and after death with the very elements of my body I desire to serve him. O, my *Guru*, grant my wish."

Like all previous path finders Gyaneswara pays the highest place in spiritual pursuit to the preceptor. It is out of his personal realisation of the scriptures which say "*Shraddha Van lavatory jnanam*" only the devoted get learning. According to the scriptures the *Guru* is *Brahma*, he is *Vishnu*, he is incarnation of Maheswara. This is repeated everyday by all devotees in the *Guru mantra* and *Guru Vandana*. But mere repetition is one thing and realisation and practising the same are another.

Gyaneswara's *Guru Bhakti* leads to the strict discipline too. This is in fact the starting point of spiritual realisation. Gyaneswara's deepest reverance for the preceptor reminds one the respect the saint poet. Amir Khusro had for Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya or Baba Farid who in search of a Guru performed the most difficult *Yogic* exercises like placing himself tied upside down in a well for fortyfive days. These are only indicators of ones devotion to God whose shadow is reflected in the *Guru*.

Gyaneswara gives the easiest prescription for God realisation. As an enlightened path finder he stands supreme. Many great scholars and householders and monks got the divine light by following his simple but steady path. He suggests

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three steps to God realisation. As recorded by his followers and scholors "of the three steps of *Sadhna—Guru* worship; saints' association and the repetition and singing of *Name*, the greatest emphasis is laid by Gyaneswara on Guru worship. Of course his goal is the *Bhakti* and realisation of *Krishna* and this is apparent from his persistent chant of Viththala the Maratha Name of God *Vishnu* worshipped with spiritual ceremony at Pandharpur and this he identifies with his God. Krishna singing:

Krishna Vishnu Hari Govinda,
Ya Namey Chey Nikhil Prabandh.

The great instructions which he received from his elder brother and Guru Nivrittinath was to associate with the saints as it was the gateway to the Lord. Of it he says:

Atmajnanay chaukhndi
Sant hey majhe ruprhi
Gyandeva hammnhe tumhi sant bolgaveti amhi
Hey padhvilon ji swami Nivrititudevin.

We must emphasise this is the greatest secret told by the *Sastras* and spoken of by the Acharyas that Saints are to be worshipped as being verily like gods manifesting on the earth. Bhagwad states to the same effect:

Na tatha me priyetam Atmayoni na Shankrah
Na chey Sankarsana na Shrri nayvatma chayatha bhavan
Nirapekham munim Santam nirvairam Samdarsnam
Anubrajamham nityam purst anghru renubhih.

I love the saints more than even my *atman* (soul), not to speak of *Shiva*, *Laxmi* or *Brahma*. I run after them to place the dust of their feet on my head. *Satsang* (association with the saints) is the shortest, surest and simplesxt path that leads to me. So says the Lord." There is no short way to God-realisation. Each path is difficult. The easiest and the surest of course is the *Bhakti Marg*. That was the way of the great saint from Maharashtra.

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"Gyaneswara revelled in the service of the saints and understood the nature of their *Sat-Chit-Anand* (supersensual Divine form) *Swarup*. He served them humbly through his elegant lectrures on *Sri Bhagavad Gita*, spreading the message of devotion to *Shri Krishna* in the country for all times. Although himself a *Yogi* of a high order he practised and preached the easier path of devotion, commenting on Chapter XII of the Gita he gives the Lord's message in the following words:

> "Arjuna there are those who puruse the difficult path of *Yoga*. They too attain to Me, Who art the goal of the *Bhaktas*. As to their getting anything extra, I can say they get only sweat earned by futile effort. The path of *Bhakti* is simpler."

God Himself has indicated the easiest path. But how Manu knew about it? How can any one know about it unless one studies the whole scripture and realises the whole Truth.

To Gyaneswara all the paths were easily accessible. He had learnt these subtle points, the difficult problems through his learned father and the elder brother-his spiritual *guru*. Through deep meditation, *gayatri* and constant practice or *Japa* he become a *siddha purusha*. He had the capacity to start a new *sampradaya* which was materialised only after the saint came in touch with his equally illustrious saint friend Namadeva.

"God can be attained by *Bhakti* alone. He is a *Bhakta* whose sole engrossing object of attention is God. *Bhakti* is that in which one thinks of nothing except of God: refuses to hear anything except His Name; serves none but God and contemplates on nothing except God."

"Such as a true sannyasin, renunciation is the aim of the Geeta without it none can escape the miseries of rebirth, for not till one is established beyond the consequences of body and reveals in *Atman*, can rise above the agony of transmigration.

He says further "Just as the impress of the king's order makes a piece of paper go as a silver coin, so also a beast, a woman and a *Sudra*, whether low or high by birth,

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whether young or old by age and whether rich or poor in possessions whosover performs Bhakti, gets emancipated and reaches God."

A person's only qualification needed is his devotion. His caste, status or creed are no considerations. This is a unique touch of the *sufi* saints and the influence of the great Prophet. It is a challenge to the Brahmincal rituals and the orthodox method of scarifical fire or *Yajna* performances. These paraphernalia are redundant.

Gyaneswara lay greatest stress on celibacy—*brahmacharya*. According to a saint scholar" Gyaneswara is very insistent on a perfect celibate and ethical life; and gives a great place to austerities. But by far the Path of realisation which he emphasises over and over is "*Bhakti* and Service to the *Enlightened Guru*." While emphasising and preaching *Sadhana* as a necessary prelude in the pursuit of the Path '*Bssignation to His Will* equally emphasised by him."

The main theme of *Bhagavad Geeta*, he says, is "*Karma Yoga* which has for its goal realisation of God and cessation of the pain of rebirth. Here the interpretation of the saint is:

"We must remember there is difference between works and realisation, between doing of actions and knowing of God." This, in other words. states the import of the text of Geeta '*yagarth karmanyo anyatrlokasayam bandhna*,' i.e. only those activities which have for their goal realisation of God and which have been resorted to by seekers after emancipation are to be followed. All other works of the world for political or social uplift and howsoever *sattvic* are to be abandoned by the advanced contemplative. These are golden fetters to bind man to the world can solve the riddle of suffering for the simple reason that it is a boon of body-consciousness which is transient, false and ephemearl."

In the *Bhakti* movement the greatest stress is on complete surrender and deep devotion to *Guru* and *God*. *Brahmacharya* is not compulsory. A householder can enlighten himself and may attain God realisation. Vallabhacharya and others did not lead the life of medicant. Kabir was a *brahmacharin* but did not insist on it. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu left everything and became a medicant. Gyaneswara insists on celibacy. But

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that is only the starting point. One has to sacrify all worldly enjoyment and devote oneself only to divine thoughts. Religious spirituality is the only goal of life joy and suffering are only two sides which the pendulum of life swings. None should be between affected by either.

"Real solution of suffering lies only in religious spirituality? Lord Shri Krishna is interpreted by the saint as:

"When people come to Me, both heaven and hell would be seen to be merely the bye ways of the thieves. . . . 'as a man who has spent all his money in going to courtezans cannot even so much a touch their door, similarly the life spent in *yagas* (sacrifices) become shameful and does not deserve any further description. . . .Even a man may know all the three worlds; his knowledge is useless if he does not know Me. For he is throwing away the grain to partake of chaff. An ideal *karma yogin* is established in actionlessness." "A person performing the highest *gunmay* (worldly) work can never be a perfect *karma yogin* which demands *gunatit* (spiritual) disinterested activity. The duty of an adept *karma yogin*—in the absence of getting an *adhikari* (competent seeker) who being aware and conscious of the ephemeral nature of the world is keen and desirous to know the *gunatit* (supersensual) spiritual Path leading to self-realisation—is to teach him *sattvic* spiritual service to be performed with disinterestedness so that he may become free of *prarabdha* (the fruits of actions of past lives) and thereafter acquire competence to pursue *Nishkam Karma Yoga* resting in the sabbath of actionlessness."

Realisation is the highest and the best way to enlightenment. This can be done not through bookish knowledge or recitation of the whole holy scripture. A person can attain it only by repeatedly uttering the holy name wholeheartedly. In *Amritanubhava,* Gyaneswar "goes into ecstasy, praising the Name of the—Lord, chanting of which with faith, renunciation and one-pointedness paves the way to realisation. Here we may point out that the work deals more with the path of *jnan,* nature of *Avidya* (ignorance, of *brahman* (*atman*) and allied subjects and ends with narration by Gyaneswara of his personal experiences.

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Like his brothers and sister, Gyaneswara took *samadhi* at the tender age of 22 after performing various miracles that have immortalised his name in religion and in history of Yoga in India."

The impact of the works of Gyaneswara in the cultural history of India today is tremendous. So long it was restricted to the Marathi speaking and Marathi knowing people. Thanks to other translations into other languages the door to enlightenment has been opened to all. The works, very much like the *Upanishads* or other realised knowledge express inner enlightenment of the saint writer. The message is soul stirring because the author clearly mentions this was the way he got himself and he wants to follow the same path. The nectar he enjoyed—*Amrita* means nectar and *anubhava* means realisation—is now being thrown to all interested. In the history of *Krishna* cult there is hardly any saint who reflected his ideas in so clear descriptions in lucid writing. The rest only preached. It is always the popular work that draws public attention because it touches the majority group and benefit them. But for a scholar he would like to present an intellectual treatise also. A deeply learned person, the only one of his kind was perhaps Sankaracharya four centuries before him Gyaneswara gave the best literary piece in another equally illustrated work-*Anubhava mrita*.

"*Anubhavamrita* consists of about 800 *ovis* and it is Dnyandeo's original treatise. It contains an original and powerful refutation of the doctrine of *Maya*, done for the first time in Marathi and an able exposition of his "*Sphurtiwada*" i.e. the doctrine of "Liminous Appearance."

Though the motive in writing *Dnyaneshwari* and *Anubhavmrita* is the same, the appeal of the two works is to two different types of people. In *Dnyaneshwari*, Dnyanadeo is mainly writing for the masses. Though the learned too find in it much to satisfy their taste, his primary aim was to make simple what was difficult to understand, "The appeal of *Anubhavamrita* is chiefly to the learned. Hence, its method is different from the one used in Dnyaneshwari, though equally critical and rationalistic. It is less persuasive and more argumentative. *Dnyaneshwari* abounds in the use of similes. The author is not averse to elaborate his point by a plethora

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of similes both from nature and everyday experience and to bring home to the reader the principles preached in the Lord's song i.e. Bhagwat Gita. These similes are drawn from the objects of everyday experience like the sun and the moon, trees, flowers flies, bees, birds, animals like cows, deer etc., to make it easy for the common man to follow his meaning. One is simply awe-struck by the breadth of experience and the keenness of observation exhibited in them. As Jesus before him and Sri Ramakrishna after used parables to reveal truths of profound import, Dnyanadeo uses similes and dialogues to explain abstruse subjects. He is acclaimed by all as the master of the art of simile. In *Dnyaneshwari* it is the mystic saint-poet speaking to the masses. On the other hand, in *Anubhavamrita*, it is the mystic scholar arguing with a scholar. It is more argumentative and critical. However whether he is writing for the masses or for the scholar, no attempt is made at fault-finding or confuting for the sake of confuting. (No use of words which will pierce the heart of the opponent). It is the mother in the teacher that is arguing with a grown-up child. The subtlety of the arguments, the evenness and impartiality with which the positions of the opponent are stated, the closeness with which they are approached and the skill with which they are examined—all these amaze the reader who is simply wonder-struck to find this unique combination of good qualities in a single person."

This brilliant analysis of the literary and mystic piece by Gyaneswara by Prof. Dandekar unfolds the intellectual aspect of the genius. One should not forget that this great work was written by Gyaneswara when he was hardly fifteen. In the whole of cultural history of India, except the versatile prodigy saint Sankaracharya there is no such parallel. Like Sankara, Gyaneswra is a born *Acharya*, a preceptor. In his approach or arguments there is no malice, no ego, no effort to show his knowledge. Gyaneswara is a messenger of God, a God-man who is respected like God. Like any great saintof the past or present Gyaneswara is worshipped by millions as God, by many non-believers as a great intellectual and by social scientists as a geat educator and by a scholar as a great philosopher. Gyaneswara was a prodigy.

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In his *Mysticism of Maharashtra*, Dr Ranade has raised a very important and valid point. When the whole family was living more less like self exile near Nasik forest, Nivrittinath was not found for sometime. All thought he must be meditating in a cave. He was doing that, but an important event took place meanwhile. On his return Nivrittinath was looking a brighter, calmer person. He was beaming with enlightenment. Immediately the learned father could guess about his god-realisation. Matsyendra Nath and Gorakh Nath of the famous Nath Sampradaya had left a rich spiritual heritage. Yogi Gahini Nath belonged to this order. He initiated Nivrittinath who became the *Guru* of *Gyaneswara*, the dozen of *Bhakti* movement in whole of Maharasthra. Viththalpant was a disciple of Ramananda. And from that lineage they derive the influence of Ramananda, the great guru of the Bhakti movement through out north India also responsible for spreading the seed of *Bhakti* in Maharashtra. Perhaps that is no time whatever may be the case, it is certain that both Nivrittinath and Gyaneswara derived their common spiritual heritage not from the lineage of Ramananda but from the deeply powerful Mahayogi Gahini Nath.

Unlike many saints, earlier and later Gyaneswara had a scientific approach to spiritual life. A man must have a certain philosophy of life without which it is just like roaming in wilderness. Besides Dr Ranade, Professor Dandekar has also pointed out this important point. Philosophy to him is not a mere abstract speculation, something abstruse and unconnected with life, nor is a philosopher only a theoriser, who merely offers a theoretical explanation of the world but it is the science of life par excellence. It is the science that tries to discover the meaning and the significance of life. He defines philosophy as "the science of the soul, the corner-stone of all sciences. If a man is not able to shift the real from the unreal, the permanent from the transitory the healthy from the agreeable, he is sure to come to grief. He will never be able to enjoy lasting happiness." According to Dnyanadeo, "it is philosophy that gives this discriminative knowledge. Therefore, whether a man would lead a happy or a miserable life depends upon whether he has a proper philosophy of life. In the absence of this knowledge all learning is useless."

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According to Dnyanadeo, "without the study of philosophy man's life is in vain or fruitless." In the thirteenth *Adhyaya* of *Dnyaneshwari*, he says:

"He is also ignorant who being proud of his superior learning, laughs contemptuously at philosophy. For, it is philosophy which will truly help him to obtain an immediate perception of his true self. But this man of learning has pulled down the walls of the science of soul and had therefore no satisfaction. Hence, he wanders from one science to another without getting any satisfaction."

Dnyanadeo further says, A man may be well versed in various branches of knowledge and crafts and yet will not deserve to be called learned because he may be stark blind regarding his own self. A man may know *Vedic* rites thoroughly and may recite mythologies. His mastery over the science of astrology may be so perfect that he has only to predict for his words to come true. He may be proficient in the science of crafts, and expert in the science of cooking. He may not have left unstudied any part of the science of the erotic. He may have studied any part of the science of the erotic. He may have studied and committed to memory the whole *Mahabharat*. As to the science of incarnations, it may incarnate itself before him. He may have studied well all the theories of morality, and have thorough knowledge of medicine. As to poetics and dramaturgy none may equal him in his knowledge about them. He may discuss the *smritis*, know the mystery of magic, and *Vedic* vocabulary may act as a handmain to his intellect. He may be well—versed in the science of grammar and deeply learned in logic. He may have such a wonderful creative imagination that he is able to offer original theories in the sciences. Thus, a so—called learned man may be proficient in all sciences, but the only science of which he is completely ignorant is the knowledge of his own self."

The saint asks, "of what avail is the learning of all these several branches of knowledge, if the man of such varied learning was ignorant of his own self? He is like a blind peacock, who has a hundred and one feathers bedecked with forms of eyes." Prof. Dandekar says, "With two more apt comparisons he exposes the futility of all knowledge without the knowledge of the self." "It is as useless as having all

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auspicious signs on the palm of the hand, without the life—line, or it is like a body well—developed but without life," says Gyaneswara.

"Dnyanadeo gives a very happy illustration to show the potency of philosophy to help man in his life. He says, 'if a man has only an atom of a plant which brings life to the dead, he need not collect other medicinal herbs." Thus comparing philosophy with the life—giving herb Dnyanadeo wants to pin—point the vital importance of philosophy in a man's life. Philosophy is the eye of the human soul. It is that which will reveal to him the goal or meaning of life. If a man is not aware of such idea and does not try to realise it, he is not better than a beast. As a rational, self—conscious creature it is man's privilege to look before and after. Man is potentially divine. It is his privilege to be endowed with a developed intellect to that he may reflect and meditate upon nature of the universe, his place in it and finally upon the nature of its creator and his relation with him. Therefore, man's primary duty is to think of his self, of the work and of God. Philosophy alone can show him the way to immortiality. Hence Dnyanadeo says, "Philosophy is the science of sciences and every man must study it."

The treatment of every problem in *Gyaneswari* is so lucid, so penetrating and so full of the fervour of spiritual experience that it is regarded as the greatest work in Marathi language. The first authentic text of *Gyaneswar* was prepared by Ekanath in 1584. A literary appreciation of Gyaneswari by Prof. W. B. Patwardhan will not be out of place. He says, the *Jnanesvari* is from the literary side so exquisite, so beautiful, so highly poetic in its metaphors and comparisons, similes and analogical illustrations, so perspicuous and lucid in style, so rich in fantasy, so delightful in its imagery, so lofty in its flights, so sublime in tone, so melodious in wordmusic, so original in its conceits, so pure in taste. . . that, notwithstanding the profundity, the recondite nature of the subject, and the inevitable limitations attendant upon the circumstances that the author's main object was to make the original intelligible, rather than add anything new, the reader is simply fascinated, floats

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rapturously on the crest of the flow, and is lost in the cadence of the rhythem and the sweet insinuating harmonies, till all is thanks—giving and thought is not."

Amritanubhava the thousand *Abhangas* and *Changdeva Pasasti* are the other contributions of Gyaneswara to literature.

After the completion of this writing Gyanadeva now known as Gyaneswara with his brothers and sister visited Pandharpur. It was this visit to Pandharpur about 1293 A.D. which made Jnanadeva and Namadeva spiritual friends and led to the coundation of the *Pandhar* or *Warkari Sampradaya*. Later Jnanadeva became the first apostle of this school of Bhakti in Maharashtra. Jnanadeva along with Namadev wandered through the length and breadth of Northern India. After visiting the holy places they returned to Pandharpur probably about 1296 A.D., on the eleventh day of the bright half of *Kartika* at the time of the great festival. After having finished the ceremony at Pandharpur on the full moon day, Jnanadeva manifested a desire to Namadeva to go to Alandi and end his life there. A fortnight later, on the 13th day of Kartika (1297 AD) he passed away while in meditation. Nivrittinatha, the elder brother and also the *Guru* of the saint Jnanadeva placed a slab on the *samadhi* of Gyaneswara which can be seen before the temple of Siddhesvara even today.

Gyaneswara occupies an honoured place among the greatest saints of Maharashtra, the other four being Namadev, Eknath, Tukaram and Ramadas. He was known for his great humility. In one of his verses in *Gyaneswari* he says :

> "If a man is fortunate, even sand can be turned into gold——If it pleases God, even pebbles, put into boiled water, may turn out to be well—prepared rice. When the Guru has accepted the disciple, the whole Samsara becomes full of joy. . . .In this very wise, was my own ignorance turned to knowledge by the grace of Nivrittinatha."

It was but natural that *Gyaneswari* manuscript was in great demand. It was more than five hundred years before the art of printing was discovered. So the scholars had to

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depend on hard written manuscripts. It was left to the great saint of Paithan, Maharashtra of the sixteenth century to edit the monumental work of the saint. It was not an easy task. By that time many 'versions' had been circulated. It is recorded by Eknath that "while engaged in this editorial work, Dnyanadeo appeared before him to prepare an authentic edition of *Dnyeshwari*. He paid a visit to Alandi, came back to Paithan and completed the work in the year 1584. Eknath was the first to edit an anthentic Dnyaneshwari and the world owes a great debt to him."

Gyaneswara will be remembered as long as Indian civilisation and culture exists. All the great saints of Maharashtra, Namdev, Eknath, Tukaram had been tremendously influenced by Gyaneswara. Namdev had paid glowing tributes to him and has described his outstanding scholarly demanour as a contemporary and close associate who accompanied him to pilgrimages. Tukaram and Eknath were his followers. Eknath edited the final version of *Gyaneswari*. Tukaram worte about Gyaneswar, "His counsels are so profound that it is difficult to fathom their depth. The only thing I can do is to bend my head before him. I place my head on his feet."

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ACHARYA RAMANANDA

(1299 AD—1410 AD)

The *Bhakti* movement changed the face of medieval India. The spiritual life so long enjoyed only by the brahmins, now got a wider field embracing almost all to join the rally. The whole of north India had undergone a silent revolution in spiritual realm. The hero of the scene was a scholarly saint, Acharya Ramananda.

The new band of spiritual path finders threw powerful challenge to the traditional orthodox school of Brahminical rituals. This galaxy of Saints who by dint of their self earned spiritual force stood against 'seclusionism' of religion to a selected few. Brahmins gave the religious leadership for a long time. None even challenged their supremacy. A word against their way of life was considered sacriligious. Buddha was the first to challenge that time honoured tradition. He was the first to cross against the torrentially currential main-stream. That was two thousand five hundred years ago. Two thousand years later the things turned different and the main bulk of members of society found suddenly that they had been made mere serfs to the dictation of a selected few who held the reins of religion and learning. There is unanimity of opinion that the most outstanding figure of the medieval religious movement was Ramananda, himself a Brahmin of the highest order.

The Brahmins had the monopoly of religion. The process of religion and learning was made too complicated and difficult for the ordinary lay men to have any access to them. They thought they were destined to be so. They were taught so. So they lost interest in enlightening themselves and were kept further away from realising divine bliss. The door was slammed against them so heavily.

It recoiled on itself. It was the torture of one of them that made the matter so obvious that reason had won over superstition in the long run. The new leadership came from a great

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Brahmin saintly scholar who himself was going to be excommunicated because he had gone on pilgrimage where he was alleged to have taken food in the hands of untouchables.

Ramananda had no such plan. He was forced by circumstances to take up the steps. As the story goes, Ramananda belonged to the Sri Vaishnava Church where he along with his spiritual *guru* Raghavananda were the main centres of attraction for learned scholars who used to visit them from far and near. Ramananda went on a pilgrimage. The institution used to follow very strict rules against 'indulgence' in having one's food here and there. On his return from pilgrimage Ramananda found the door of his own Vaishnava Church closed before him only because of his relaxation of rules for preparation and consumption of food. Even the *guru*, Raghavananda opposed Ramananda. Ramananda failed to convince the school, the friends and the *guru* that a pilgrim may take food anywhere and everywhere he likes in the name of God. A person who goes on pilgrimage and constantly thinks of God need not care to find out whether the food was prepared by a Brahmin or a non-Brahmin. He went a step further and said; in the eyes of the Almighty there cannot be any difference between a Brahmin and non-Brahmin. That was too much for the Vaishnava Church to accept. Ramananda was declared a rebel. That he was. This incident changed the face of spiritual India. Not only that Ramananda refused to conduct *prayaschitta* or impose penance for breaking rules of self-control, he wanted to change the existing rules. Ramananda was convinced that he was not wrong. That very day the learned Saint decided to change the outlook of seekers of Truth and open the gate to all desiring to enjoy the heavenly bliss irrespective of their social status, economic position or academic attainment. He experimented on a new line. Not only was it a success, it showed the whole world how a man born low can give spiritual leadership too. He invited the low, the ignorant, the poor to come forward. It was one of the biggest experiments in the history of civilization. Not only followers, a new band of religious leaders also came forward. It is recorded, in the *Cultural Heritage of India* "the call and the response came from the poor illiterate commoners. The new masters, in spite of their humble birth or station, rose to the height of social

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esteem and popularity. The earliest examples were Namadeva a tailor and Sadna, a butcher. Kabir who became the central figures of the spiritual revolution, belonged to a despised weaver family. Ravidas, who was a cobbler, claimed among his disciples, Jhali, the queen of Chittore, and Mirabai the famous princess devotee. Sena, a barber, became the spiritual guide of the Raja of Bandogarh. Dhanna, a Jat, and Pipa, a Rajput, were among the principal disciples of Ramananda. Nabha, the author of *Bhaktamala*, was a *pariah*. Dadu and Rajjab came from cotton-ginning Muslim families. Many of them continued their low vocation side by side with their holy mission. They believed in the honest useful, and devout life of a householder."

It was a secular all-embracing approach. All were cordially invited to join. In the new movement there was no place for rituals. All these saintly people explained their points of view in the popular local dialects leaving aside Sanskrit, the language of the few *elite*. Besides castes, language was also another bottleneck for the laymen to come closer to the things of their heart. They wanted to know something about the unknown dweller in their heart but had no access to the description because it was beyond their comprehension. Ramananda departed from the traditional path. He gave his religious discourses in the language of the people. In the process, not only men, also the local language had opportunities to flourish.

The Saint has a lofty tradition besides his personal achievement both in learning and spiritual attainment. Ramananda, the fountain-head of this new unique religious movements in medieval North India was the fifty in spiritual descent from Ramanuja. He was born at Prayag in a Kanya Kubja Brahmana family, in 1299 A.D. Not much is known about his personal life except that he was the son of Punyasadana (or Bhuri Karma or Devala) and Susila. The child was named Ramadatta and as he grew up, he acquired knowledge very rapidly. By the time he was twelve years old, he had become a finished *pundita*, and went to Varanasi for advanced studies in religious philosophy. While still a student under a Smarta teacher he happened to meet Raghavananda, a prominent teacher of the Sri Vaishnava sect founded by Ramanuja. Raghavananda admitted Ramadatta into his school, initiated

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him into the secret of his creed and changed his name to Ramananda. After serving his *guru* for a considerable time he went on a long pilgrimage and returning to Varanasi settled at Panchaganga ghat.

The spiritual institution was quite strict as it was orthodox. As the details of the story goes the Sri Vaishnava sect had a set of rules which forbade non-Brahmins from becoming teachers and it imposed upon all the strictest rules as to the preparation and consumption of food. When Ramananda returned from his long wanderings a controversy arose between the guru and the disciple. It was alleged that it must have been impossible for Ramananda to have observed all the rules and he was asked to impose penance upon himself. On his refusal to do so, he was expelled from the sect. The results of the controversy were fraught with most momentous consequences for the religious history of North India. Ramananda by his expulsion from the brotherhood for an imaginary impurity was converted to broader notions. He got himself rid of the spirit of caste exclusiveness and the pride that goes along with one's consciousness of spiritual superiority. He based his ethical system not on spiritual pride, but on spiritual humility and recognised the equality of all men and women, irrespective of their caste, colour or creed. He further held that when a devotee surrenders his life to the divine will, his former life is lost in God and a new life begins for him. The Sri Vaishnavas admitted only the Brahmanas as teachers and only people of high castes as lay members but Ramananda permitted no such bounds and said :

Jati panti puchai nahin koi
Hari ko bhajan so Hari ka hoi

"Let no one ask man's caste or with whom he eats. If a man is devoted to Hari, he becomes Hari's own."

He started preaching to all without any reserve and admitted not only the members of the lower castes to his sect, but also their right to become teachers as well. Among his first twelve followers were : Ravidas, the leather worker; Kabir, the Muslim weaver; Dhanna, the Jat peasant; Sena, the barber; Padmavati and Surasari. Ramananda called his followers

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Avadhutas, because they had 'shaken off' the bonds of narrow-mindedness.

Although the great claim of Ramananda to recognition is his insistence on the equality of all believers, a corollary to this teaching also deserves attention. The doctrines of his predecessors were all given in Sanskrit, the language of the select few. Their scriptures were learned books, written for the learned men in a learned language. In order that his gospel of faith may appeal to all alike and may be widely diffused, he also gave up the use of Sanskrit and started preaching in the language of the people. His followers, Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Ravidas, Tulsi all composed their hymns in one or other form of Hindi. The labours of these saints led to the development of modern vernacular literature in Northern India whose foundations were laid by Ramananda himself.

It was a happy moment for India to welcome a new message of love. The advent of the religion of the prophet Mohammed had infused fresh ideas to Indian thinking. Every thinking person at this transitional period of India's religious history tried to contribute his best his own light. "Kumarila, Sayana others tried to re-establish the Vedas and the vedio way of life on a stronger foundation by a fresh intepretation of the text. Sankara, Ramanuja and others went deeper into the philosophy of *Jnana* and *Bhakti*. Hemadri, Raghunandana and other digest writers devoted their lives to the regulation and conservation of the social order. Agamavagisa, Sarvananda, Purnananda and other Tantrikas of Bengal, the various sects of Vaisnavism and Saivism, the schools of Niranjana; Nathas and Yogis-all made earnest attempts to find out a way that would suit the needs of the time.', Ramananda borrowed ideas from all these schools, vitalised them with love and devotion and founded a new path of spiritual realisation. His unique contribution to the spiritual life of India is the spirit of synthesis observable in his teachings. He accepted all that was true and of permanent value in our cultural heritage the philosophy of meditation (*Yoga*) and knowledge from the north and absolute surrender (*Prapatti*) of the cult of devotion (Bhakti) from the south—and rejected all that was untrue, ephemeral or rigidly sectarian. There is a popular verse of this effect:

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Bhakti Dravida upaji, laye Ramananda
Pargata kiya Kabir ne sapta dipa nava khanda
Bhakti arose first in the Dravida land;
Ramananda brought it to the North, and
Kabir spread it to the seven continents
and nine divisions of the world.

It is unfortunate that we do not possess any collection of his songs, nor do we come across many of his sayings. In the *Crantha Sahib* we only find a single hymn ascribed to Ramananda but this poem is sufficient indication of his philosophy and the voice of a great spiritual philosopher is audible in it.

"Whither shall I go, Sir, I am happy at home.
My heart will not go with me; it hath become a cripple.
One day I did have an inclination to go;
I ground sandal, took distilled aloe wood and many perfumes,
And was proceeding to worship God in a temple, when my Guru showed me God in my heart.
Wherever I go I find only water or stone,
But thou, art equally contained in everything
The Vedas and Puranas all have I seen and searched,
Go thou thither, if God be not here.
O true Guru, I am a sacrifice unto the
Who hast cut away all my perplexities and doubts.
Ramananda's Lord is the all pervading God;
The Guru's word cutteth away millions of sins."
(Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion Vol. VI*)

The medieval Vaishnav cult of Krishna and Radha showed new tendencies—no doubt influenced by the *Padma* and *Brahmavaivarta Puranas*—in which Radha plays and important part in the life of Krishna. But with the lapse of time the cult was carried to extremes, and Radha gained more and more prominence and degrading elements crept into the cult. Ramananda replaced Krishna and Radha by Rama and Sita and called his sect *Ramavats* or *Ramites*. This was fur-

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ther developed by his followers, Kabir, Ravidas, Dadu, Malukadasa and Tulsidas. The religion propounded by them is chaste and pure. Though Ramananda used the popular name Rama, his God was the one God of love and mercy.

Ramananda brought God nearer man. He was an object not only of devotion but of love. Learned scholars are of the view that though Ramananda used the popular hero of Ramayana, the beloved of his heart, the Saint had an ideal and idol of his own. The deity of his daily worship was a symbol of 'love and mercy without any imperfection—not the unconditional *Brahman of the Vedauta*, but the beloved, the friend and the Lord of one's heart'.

This was a fresh outlook. This was perhaps the influence of the existing *Sufi* teachings. Sufism on one side, and the cult of *Bhakti* on the other, were the two banks of the same river. Ramananda joined them together by a bridge—of synthesis of ideas, a new approach of cohesion, assimilation and not dissention. It was a new message to the ignorant illiterate masses who so long were only dumb spectators to the religious fanfares of the rituals of the orthodox traditional type. They knew for the first time that they also could participate in the new movement. They also realised that they were party to the culture and philosophy of the land. They could feel that their hearts were also citadels of God. They, for the first time, started having a tremendous confidence in themselves. They were no longer tools, they were living human beings and had equal rights and authorities to practise and preach the holy name of God. It was a new message of hope to millions. The whole Hindu outlook to self elevation and spiritual pursuit underwent a revolutionary chage, a thorough reshuffle of ideas and they all knew that the hero was Ramananda. Ramananda had two special advantage to be the leader of the new movement. He was himself a very learned scholarly Brahmin. He knew the versions of the scriptures so thoroughly well that none could oppose him so easily. None could hoodwink him. And secondly, more significantly, his own *guru*, another equally learned and respected scholar, stroke a death knell to his whole prestige and personality. In a moment's time, just the whole life's learning, spiritual

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attainment were brushed aside only because of a superstition. It was the orthodoxy of the traditional school of thought that had the audacity to challenge the purity of the Saint that thoroughly turned the table. He was not to be cowed down by such a reasoning. He failed to convince his *guru* that a pilgrim cannot be impure. This was a battle between orthodoxy and traditional misbeliefs and reasoning and rational thinking. Raghavananda, the *guru* was very much fond of his disciple. He was pround of him. He gave him a high status in his organisation, at par with him. And yet when it became a question between tradition and reasoning, like a typical grammarian, he did not like to depart an inch from the time honoured track. He is not to be misunderstood. He was a servant of circumstances. He could not size up the personality of the illustrious disciple. He could not dream that the disciple would stand against his verdict and start a new cult. He had underrated Ramananda. *Prayaschitta* or atonement can be performed in an hour's time. Ramananda preferred devoting his whole life to oppose this. It was of course, a boon in disguise for Ramananda and the whole country. The Hindu religion got thoroughly revitalised.

The Saint had greatly influenced religious life in India. It has been observed that, "This new ethical outlook was developed in various directions by Ramananda's successors, but through all their teaching we find emphasis ever laid upon two great principles: (1) that perfect *Bhakti* consists in perfect love directed to God, and (2) that all servants of God are brothers. His follower Kabir carried this doctrine of catholicity still farther, and it reached its full development, and what is more, its general acceptance by the masses of Hindustan, seven generations later, through the works of modern India's greatest poet, Tulsidas. These great saints have taught that every individual can work out salvation by dedicating himself to the Lord, that in matters of faith, the invidious distinctions of caste and colour have absolutely no place, and that the meditation of a priest with all its paraphernalia of rites and ceremonies has no meaning and efficacy, when 'the eyes of the soul' turns round from darkness to light, from the finite to the Infinite."

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It may be truly said that he was the father of the Bhakti movement. The most important twelve followers of the Saint were Ravidas the cobbler, Kabir the weaver, Dhanna the Jat peasant, Sena, the barber, Pipa the Rajput, Bhavanand, Sukhananda, Asananda, Surasuranada, Paramananda, Mahananda and Sri Ananda. The Saint had a wider vision of spiritual life. He was a person with wider outlook. He not only made no distinction of caste and creed, not only did he cross beyond the border of Hindu religion by accepting even Muslim devotees as his disciples, he did not make any distinction or discrimination even between male and female. It is recorded that "Ramananda is the teacher who placed the sexes on any equality by calling two women to be his disciples." Among his top disciples were Padmavati and Surasari who attained high spiritual power. His disciples too initiated women among whom members of royal families. It must be clearly mentioned that Ramananda did not have any grudge against the Brahmins who had ill treated him. Among his direct disciples and favourite students Anantananda and Sukhananda were high class Brahmins who were guided so affectionately by Ramananda.

Although and incarnation of devotion and love, Ramanuja did not allow *Shudras* to have access to Vedic Scriptures. Ramananda, although belonged to the lineage of the great Saint did not bind himself to this limited outlook. It is recorded, "The life of eternal joy, says Ramanuja, is reserved for the first three castes, for the *Sudra* cannot be admitted to the study of the *Vedas* which is essential for the acquisition of knowledge. Thus, in the philosophy of Ramanuja rigid sectarianism triumphs over the universality of the love of God. But it was Ramananda who removed this restriction and threw the gates of heaven open to every caste and colour and creed. The Brahmins taught only pupils of their own caste and in their own *mutts*, but Ramananda taught everybody and everywhere. He had no esoteric doctrines reserved only for the privileged few."

There was a language difficulty. The learned scholar found some difficulties to give the knowledge of the holy scriptures to his favourite disciples directly. They were all in Sanskrit. Some of his near ones whom Ramananda selected as the

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preachers of his new message of love were already enlightened souls. For them and the masses Ramananda introduced a new technique by composing hymns in simple Hindi. They were sung in chorus among the masses and it aroused a tremendous feeling of devotion. A new serene atmosphere of *bhakti*, rather a flood of new religious movement, swept away the whole country. Ramananda himself did not write many hymns. His knowledge was realised light. He enlightened his disciples who carried on this task. They composed thousands of hymns in praise of the Almighty in a simple lucid style. The scriptures were no longer restricted to the few Brahmin scholars who so long had been keeping the whole thing just as a closely guarded secret. The window of enlightenment was opened and fresh air entered the whole new social order. The impact was more than that of a silent social revolution in outlook. Moral values had a new interpretation. Everywhere people heard an echo of the Master Saint's message of universal brotherhood of man.

It was a golden period for Cultural History of India. A new social order was born only in the field of religion and ethics. A new treasure of literature flourished as a result of the new movement. A biographer aptly records:

"The labours of these saints led to the development of vernacular literature. As in Europe, the Bible was made accessible to all by the Reformes, so here in India. The sacred literature, the knowledge of which was the sole monopoly of the Brahmins, now found its expression in the vernacular, thanks to the efforts of these Vaishnavite saints. The national intellect was freed from the thraldom of scholastic learning." It was largely owing to the influence of Ramananda and his followers, says Dr Grierson, that Hindi became a literacy language, and not only was its most shining light. Tulsidas a devout follower of Ramanada but all his poetry was written under the direct influence of his teaching. The debt which the literature of Hindustan owes to Ramananda cannot be over-estimated. The language of the common people attained the dignity of a classical tongue, when the poet-singers of Hindustan made use of it, while pouring out their full heart in profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

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Describing the impact of this new wave of thinking Dr Ranade writes:

"It gave a literature of considerable value in the vernacular language of the country. It modified the strictness of the old spirit of caste exclusiveness. It raised the *Sudra* classes to the position of spiritual power and social importance almost equal to that of the *Brahmins*. It gave sanctity to the family relations and raised the status of women. It made the nation more humane, at the same time more prone to hold together by mutual toleration. It suggested, and partly carried out, a plan of reconstruction with the Muhammedans. It subordinated the importance of rites and ceremonies and of pilgrimages and fasts, and of learning and contemplation to the higher excellence of worship by means of love and faith. It checked the excesses of Polytheism. It tended in all these ways to raise the nation generally to a higher level of capacity both of thought and action."

Dr Micol Nacniol wrltes:

"The langour of the Hindu atmosphere is replaced by a new stringency, a new vigour, even if it is only in its negations, and a more decidedly ethical outlook. It is evident again and again, as we read the sayings of this group of saints that a new blood has flowed into a Hinduism of which robustness had never been the note, and which had been growing more and more anaemic."

The literary genius of these new songs in praise of God has been aptly described in the following words:

"Whether they are cries of longing, or utterances of love and devotion, or endeavours to understand and explain life and destiny, these are never merely decorative in their purpose. They are primarily religious and only secondarily works of art. They are Psalms—meant to be sung, not said, and inseparable, for a full appreciation, from their music. No doubt the music helps to make up for an occasional poverty of thought and barrenness of language, but it enables them to mount and soar, and carries their message, more surely to its lodgement in the hearer's heart. They are thus true lyrics and their melancholy music makes more touching still, the simple appeal in many of them, of which we might almost say that they have no language but a cry."

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The Acharya categorically told his disciples that the secret of realised knowledge is the only real one. It cannot be compared with bookish knowledge. "The way of faith is higher than the way of knowledge," he declared. This was nothing new. It was already in the holy scriptures. Only the presentation was a novel thing. It is here that Ramanada stands as a pioneer.

The whole religious set up of the country witnesses a thorough change. The wave of the *Bhakti* movement had far reaching effect. It has been recorded:

"The abiding interest of the great Bhakti movement in India lies in its affirmation of the claims of the human heart and in the moral and spiritual uplift to which it has supplied a stimulus. The great saints of India have completely surrendered themselves to the ideal love which has been 'the anchor of their purest thoughts, the nurse, the guide, the guardian of the heart, and the soul of their moral being'."

This great Saint breathed his last in 1410 A.D. at the age of hundred and eleven.

Even more than five hundred and seventy years after his passing away the Saint's words are so relevant to present social set up. The downtrodden and the unfortunate people belonging to the categories of those who have been denied spiritual light, are particularly conscious of the contribution by the great rebel saintly bold Brahmin who singlehandedly stood six hundred years ago against the entire society, including his own spiritual Guru. His spirit of renunciation, the outlook of secularism and message of brotherhood of man are universal. He was a saint whose ideals may be propagated by research institutions on international platforms. He was a champion who fought for human rights and is so relevant even today.

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SYED ALI HAMADANI

(1314 AD—1384 AD)

Syed Ali Hamadani, affectionately known in Kashmir as *Shah-i-Hamadan*, or the Lord of Hamadan was a great saint of fourteenth century. It was he who practically was responsible to bring the message of universal brotherhood of man as propagated by the Holy Prophet to the beautiful valley of Kashmir.

The saint was loved and respected for his deep learning, great devotion, and compassion. Thousands used to throng to him to listen to the message. And it was no wonder when more than thirty-seven thousand of them immediately got initiated by him, embracing the new religion. This was the beginning of spread of Islam in Kashmir. It was a fascinating religion, particularly the message of love and equality attracted quite a number. Even those who did not embrace Islam loved to listen to the learned Syed.

The background of Syed Ali Hamadani is quite rich. He has been described in *History of Kashmir* as "the most prominent among the Sufi missionaries". He hailed from a noble family and claimed descent from Ali, the fourth Caliph. Syed Shihabud-Din, his father was a Governor of Hamadan. Syed Ali Hamadani, "practically established Islam in Kashmir and laid its foundation well and true." This great saint was also affectionately called *Amir-i-Kabir* or the Great Amir. He was born at Hamadan 12 *Rajab*, 714, i.e. October 22, 1314 AD. It is recorded in history that "His geneology can be traced to Hazrat Ali through Imam Husain. Born in a family with traditions of scholarship and piety, Syed Ali learnt the *Holy Quran* by heart in his teens." This learning was imparted due to the initiative of the maternal uncle Alauddin Daula a 'saint of considerable piety' and devotion. His father who was a Governor of Hamadan, popularly called *Hakim* showed no interest in the child's education. In spite of that the child became a great scholar by studying Islamic theology.

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It is recorded, "When he was only twelve years old his maternal uncle introduced him to Shaikh Muzdaqani who after teaching him the elementary principles of Sufism sent him to Taqiuddin Ali Dusti, another disciple of Alauddin Daula Simani. Syed Ali remained with him for about two years and after his death returned to Shaikh Muzdaqani who put the finishing touches to his education."

(Rafiqi : *Sufism in Kashmir*, p. 32)

Syed Ali was a well travelled person. He made the holy pilgrimage as many as twelve times. He visited Kashmir a number of times. Perhaps the saint was inspired by his preceptor Shaikh Sharaf-ud-din Muzdaqani to take these extensive traveles to complete his education. This was not the only case. "The Sufis in general and the Kubraviyas in particular travelled extensively in the various parts of the Muslim world".

(*Ibid*, p. 33).

Prithvi Nath Kaul tells us, "For twenty-one years Syed Ali journeyed from one country to the other and came in contact with contemporary scholars and saints of note. When he returned home in 1370 AD he found that the political conditions in Persia had undergone a change during his absence, and Timur who ruled Persia had unleashed a policy of repression against the Syeds, forcing most of them out of the country. Syed Ali Hamadani accompanied by seven hundred more Syeds, left Persia to escape the tyrannical rule of Timur and entered Kashmir in 1372 AD. Sultan Qutubuddin was the reignning king. The Sultan was at time on one of his military expeditions against the ruler of Kabul and his brother, Qutb-ud-din had the honour of receiving the party of Syeds and waiting upon them for four months after which they left on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Seven years later (in 1379) Shah Hamadan again visited the valley and stayed there for over two and a half years. He paid a third visit to Kashmir in 1383, but had to leave early due to ill health. While at Pakhli in Hazara district he had a relapse and passed away in 1384. His disciple carried the dead body to Khutlan where it lies burried. A monument to the Syed stands at Pakhli of which Babar writes in his diary

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'I made the circuit (*tawaf*) when I came and took Chaghan-Sarai in 920 AH (1514 AD).' "

(PNK Bamzai : *History of Kashmir*, p. 483)

The Syeds who accompanied Ali Hamadani did not come to Kashmir only. Many of them left Persia for good and came to Gulbarga in South India, and Kichaucha in Faizabad, east of Lucknow.

(*Sufism in Kashmir*, p. 37)

This is nothing new. There are references in Ibn Battuta's Travels in *Asia and Africa* of miracles by a *yogi* in the court of Muhammad bin Tughluq.

Miracles apart, the saint's learning, the new message of the Prophet attracted people to accept the new faith in large number. One must not forget "the performance of miracles was no part of the activities of Sufis. They rejected the supernatural powers of the *yogis* with scorn calling it *istidraj*, conferring the benefits by God on obstinate sinners." In *Futuhat-i-Kubraviya* Abdul Wahhab and in *Tarikh-i-Kabir*, Muhiud-Din Miskin refer to a legend which is quite well in circulation about the saint's visit to Kashmir. The saint, it seems, was once invited by the ruler of Persia, Timur. The main purpose was to see some miracle in the palace. Syed Ali was widely known and respected as a *Pir* for his great spiritual powers. It is stated "When the Syed came, the arrangements for sitting had been made in such a way that *qibla* would be behind him. It is said that the Syed had never sat like that in his life. But when Syed Ali sat down the palace rotated and he faced the *qibla*. After the meal was served, Timur asked Syed Ali whether he had taken lawful or unlawful food. Before the Syed could answer, a woman came to the court crying that she had kept a lamb for her *pir* Syed Ali and that the king's officials took it from her forcibly. The Syed at once remarked that it was served to him. Thus Timur became annoyed and ordered the Syed to leave his kingdom immediately. Thereupon Syed Ali returned to Kashmir."

The whole story may not be based on facts but the very idea of its popular circulation shows the respect the saint commanded both in his original land and the land of his migration.

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About Timur's tyranny over and turning out of the Syeds there are differences of opinions of *pundits*. Some say Timur was not so unkind and the Syeds left for India on their own. "There is ample evidence to show that Timur was not hostile to the Syeds and he cannot be believed to have provoked Syed Ali to leave his native place. Syed Ali and his associates must have been attracted to Kashmir because Muslim rule was newly established there and offered considerable opportunities for popularising Islam." According to Jafar Badakshi Syed Ali had been ordered by Shaikh Muzdaqani to travel and preach the truth to the people. Syed Ali himself is said to have remarked that wherever he went, God the most powerful commanded him to travel and preach to the people. It is also true that the said had sent two of his illustrious disciples, Syed Tajuddin and Syed Hussain to Kashmir, to "explore the religious atmosphere of that country." These two religious preachers came to Kashmir during the rule of Sultan Shihabud Din (1354AD—1373 AD) and Syed Ali reached Kashmir only during the reign of Sultan Qutbud Din (1373 AD—1389 AD). The Sultan welcomed the Saint warmly. Syed's abode was assigned at Ala-ud-Dinpura in Srinagar. The place is now known as Khanqah-i-Mualla. Syed Ali made full use of his vast learning to the cause of propagation of Islam in the valley. He wrote extensively on Sufism, a subject in which the general mass irrespective of sect or religion was curious. It is recorded about his versatility that "although a great authority on theology and philosophy, he did not disdain to write on such varied secular subjects as jurisprudence, political science and the science of physiogonomy. Author of more than a hundred works on logic, ethics and other subjects in prose, Syed Ali also wrote Persian poetry of no mean order. His orders are naturally Sufistic and his mystical poems illustrate his broad humanistic outlook on life and religion.

Although the valley had been ruled at that time by a Sultan the new religion had hardly any impact on the masses. Kashmir had been an ideal land of secular thoughts for centuries. No other state in India had shown this great harmony in religious adjustment. Even the Sultan used to visit temples along with his Muslim followers. It is recorded in *History of Kashmir*, "Till then the new religion

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had not made any appreciable headway in the valley, even though the Sultans had been its followers. The majority of the people being still Hindus, the Muslims had nothing to distinguish them in dress, manners and customs from their compatriots. In Alauddinpura, for instance, was a temple which was visited every morning both by the Sultan and his Muslim subjects." To avert the recurrence of famines, Jonaraja says in his *Kings of Kashmira*, "the (Muslim) king performed a *yajna* in the month of *Bhadra* and distributed large gifts" (page 53). Prithvi Nath Kaul tells us "in contravention of the Islamic teachings he had two wives who were sisters. Syed Ali disapproved of these practices and in accordance with his advice, Qutb-ud-din divorced one of the sisters and retained the other. He also advised the Sultan to adopt the dress common in Muslim countries."

The ruler believed in secularism more than anything else and Hasan tells us in *Kashmir under the Sultan* "anxious not to antagonise his non-Muslim subjects, Qutb-ud-din not follow every advice of the Syed, but he held him in great reverence and visited him every day. Syed Ali gave him a cap which out of respect, the Sultan always wore under his crown. The subsequent Sultans followed the same practice until the cap was buried along with the body of Fateh Shah according to the latter's will." The saint had been the founder of Sufistic thoughts in Kashmir on a sound base. A large number of scholars who followed him as disciple went into the interiors of the valley to spread the message of the great Prophet. The catholicity of the views of Kashmiris in the realm of sprituality was due to the three contemporary saints equally outstanding on merit of their own spiritual enlightenment—Lalleshwari, Syed Ali Hamadani and Nand Rishi. Till today this harmony in thought is felt and the mutual respect for each other's spiritual faith is the most ideal in the valley. Bamzai records in History of Kashmir "He (Syed Ali) came in contact with the popular *Saiva* teacher Lalleshwari and the great Sufi saint Shiakh Nurud Din, and had long discourses with them on spitual and philosophic subjects. Lalleshwari's association with Shah Hamadan was due to an identity of the faith of Sufis and Hindu mendicants and saints in Kashmir. The Sufis had charm of manners and attractive personalities

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and treating all religions alike they naturally preferred the faith to which they themselves belonged and which their patron favoured. It was therefore natural that they should have influenced the people among whom they lived and worked and thus facilitated the peaceful propagation of Islam among the general mass of people in Kashmir."

(*Ibid.* p. 485)

There are at least three authentic biographies on the saint and all of them agree on the versatility of the saint. He was a prolific writer and the number of books written by him is supposed to be one hundred and seventy. Abdul Wahhab is the only biographer who gives a list of sixteen of his works. In his *Futuhat-Kubraviya*, he claims that "Of the 170 works written by the Syed he had seen abut 50 but mentions only the following : *Zakhiratul-Muluk*, *Marifatu,l-Zuhd*, *Habil-Fasu*, *Majmau'l Ahadis*, *Minhajul-Arifin*, *Miratul Taihin*, *Mashariqul-Anwar*, *Sharh-i-Asmai.Husna*, *Risala-i-Talquiniya*, *Adabul-Muidin*, *Risala-i-Fazriya*, *Rasala-i-Khawatriya*. *Risala Dah Qaida*, *Risala-i-Manaquib*, *Sairu'l Talibin* and *Asaru'l Nazi*.

The books are rare. According to Dr Rafizi (who took great pains to find out the sources of these great works) "Various libraries in India, Iran and Europe have a number of treatises written by Syed Ali in their collections. In India, the Riza Library Rampur and the Oriental Research Department, Srinagar have the largest number of these. In Iran the Kitab Khana Milli of Teheran, the library of Mashhad and the Malik Library, Teheran have manuscript copies of several treatises by Syed Ali. In England works of Syed Ali are to be found in India Office Library and in the British Museum. A collection of Syed Ali's works is also in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris."

Just as the holyscriptures of the Hindus say *svaddhavan lavatay jhanam*, only those who are obedient can learn, the saint says, "Obedience to Divine command is necessary to have God realisation." Like a great devotee of the *Bhakti* tradition, the great saint stresses *Iman* and Islam, the first is more important to have God realisation, "Salvation is obtained through *Iman* and religious and world prosperity are

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gained through Islam." This is very much in the spirit of complete surrender to the Almighty, the basis of all religious experiments of God realisation in India. Keeping in tune with all the greatest minds, who gave guidance to spiritual pursuit, Syed Ali Hamadani sings to the glory of God and completely surrenders himself at His feet brushing aside all his life's great learning, scholarship and pilgrimages. He identifies, in all humility himself as a true servant of the Lord with full *iman*—"*Iman* consists in believing in God, His angels, His books, His prophets and predestination. Islam is the worship of God without associating anything with Him and the belief in the prophethood of Mohammad. Islam urges its followers to say prayers (five times daily), to observe the fast (in the month of *Ramazan*), to pay the *Zakat*, and to perform the pilgrimage."

Syed Ali observes "*Islam* is not identical with *Iman*. *Iman* indicates the acceptance of the religion and *Islam* demands the performance of duties associated with the religion." He further elaborates the point by saying that *Iman* is the attestation by heart of its principles, but perfect *Iman* is that which secures one freedom from hell fire and brings one near to God."

This shows clearly that the saint had an imprint of the religious movement in whole of India. Lalleshwari and Nand Rishi completely abandoned the rituals of religious routines followed both by Hindus and Muslims respectively. Now it is clear that all the three contemporary Saints laid the greatest stress on devotion to God, complete surrender to Him and full trust in the Supreme Soul. It is here that Syed Ali joins the true spirit of a great path finder and guides humanity to God realisation because for having complete faith in God it is not necessary to distinguish between one religion and another. God, the Supreme Soul, *Allah* to Muslim, Holy Trinity Divinity to Christians, *Shiva* to the Hindus is universal.

All Indian saints have been stressing the need of character building for God-realisation. Saint Syed Ali too insists, "the heart must be pure." Like Lalleshwari and later Nand Rishi, he insists on serenity of heart. The Saint says, first the purification of the body is necessary. This is *abrar*, one must cleanse all parts of one's body from sin. The second is *Salikan*

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—one must purify the *nafs* from evil and third is *sidiqan*, one must cleanse his heart from everything except God. God will be the only thought of a man's daily thinking. Except God one must abandon everything else.

Without purification of heart and mind prayers would have hardly any meaning, "He is critical of the prayer offered by the common Muslims who, in his opinion, do not understand the essence of prayer. They pray with lips alone and face the *qibla* mechanically."

Here also similarity in the sayings of Lalleshwari, Nand Rishi and Syed Ali are obvious, clear and deeply significant. The three together brush aside anything that is artificial and mechanical as redundant and superficially useless.

Real prayer must be without any desire. Only when they forget everything and say "May you be exalted, O Almighty God"—they "fly into the world of Sanctity." Like all other true path finders of the world, Syed Ali Sahib assigns highest place to prayers. He says "prayer connects the creature with the creator and is a medium through which man can approach God. The real meaning of prayer is *munajat*, invocation, which is impossible without concentration." The Saint insists that this prayer is nothing but a "conversation" with the Almighty. He describes it as *mukhataba*. This divine conversation can be held by an *arif* who can achieve the degree of perfection.

Self-sacrifice is necessary. Fasting is "compulsory". Whether rich or poor, one must follow his drill of regular fasts.

Pilgrimage or *Haj* to Mecca is a must. But pilgrimage does not mean mere journey. There must be contemplation of God. The Saint himself made extensive pilgrimages and went twelve times on *Haj*. It is a must for those who can afford and who are physically fit, he asserts.

Just like *Sachchidananda* stage, the highest stage of God-realisation, the saint describes the highest degree of gnosis as *marifa-mushahada* where "the aspirant is completely absorbed in the contemplation of the nature, attributes and works of God." It is attained only when the heart is clean and crystal clear and "is purged of evil." "Those who possess this type of

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marifa have plunged themselves in the mysteries of God in the hope of *Wisal*."

This blissful highest stage of God-realisation can be achieved only through Divine revelation which he describes as *wahy* and *divine* inspiration which he describes as *ilham*. He makes it clear that "The Divine revelation is granted to the prophets and Divine inspiration to the saints."

Mystical ecstasy is a sign of divine inspiration. These explorers of Truth must have great "thirst" for God. He describes it as a 'desert of thirst'. This he describes as a stage of *hyrat*.

There is a lot of similarity in the description of the saint with the description of the God-realised souls vividly given in the holy scriptures of the Hindus. At that level, religion does not matter. It is a common platform for all explorers of Truth which is eternal. Love for God comes out of ecstasy. "The love of God emerges from gnosis and the greater the gnosis, the more perfect is the love of God." The saint emphatically says, "Man's love of God is supreme end of the life of human beings. Those who believe that love cannot exist between man and God are imperfect sufis. The unique distinction bestowed upon man by God is that angels were ordered to prostrate themselves before Adam. This took place because man alone was capable of attaining the love of God."

Every man loves himself. When that love is finally dedicated to God, he reaches nearer Him. He writes, "those who are able to recognise that the highest benefactor is God, cease to think of worldly benefactors and concentrate on God, thereby strengthening their bonds of love with the Almighty."

The saint further elucidates, "the respect for virtues and attributes may also lead people to the love of God, who is the embodiment of all known and unknown attributes."

"The love of beauty is the source of infatuation for everything that is beautiful and attractive, it gives pleasure and produces excitement. The love for beauty is also instrumental in directing the mind of man engrossed in earthly love, to the love of that Highest Being, who is the repository of all beauty."

The saint gives a bit of heavenly nectar when he says, "The love based on spiritual relationship has no worldly source. It

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is the result of God's own gift and is predestined. He bestows spiritual love on one whom He chooses, without any other cause or reason."

"Thus the causes which infuse love into man are combined in their highest perfection in God, so He alone is worthy of love. Since man's love for God is the result of *marifa*, all lovers cannot be endowed with the same degree of love. They differ in intensity of their love, in proportion to their *marifa*."

This description is very much near the theory of *Karuna* in Hindu (showering of blessings by God) philosophy and *mercy* (according to Christian philosophy).

Divine Love is ecstasy. That is beauty. That is Truth. That is exactly where the highest thoughts always meet together. In ancient times the sages and seers, after enlightenment described this great revelation as *satyam, shivam, sundaram*. That is, Truth eternal, the Almighty one God, which is Beauty personfied. A man must be basically good; says the saint. The great qualities of a good man are forgiveness, patience, good will to all and oneness with all. The most striking similarity of thoughts of both Hindu saints and Muslim Sufis are reflected in the definition of a good man. The saint says that a good man must have the following qualities. He must be amenable "to forgive despite power to wreak vengeance, to exhibit patience in anger; to wish well even to an enemy and to prefer the needs of others to one's own."

All religions stress on basic goodness of man. The medium must be good. God realisation needs certain qualities of the man—purity, sincerity, eagerness, thirst for meeting and all these are insignificant and meaningless if the man is not basically good. A man must be good and as simple as a child. There must be no malice, no dirt, no feeling of hatred against anybody to have God realisation. In this respect all religions have the same common code of conduct. Moral values, ethical approach and basic qualities of those searching Truth must be the same. They must be comman in the preaching of all saints from all faiths, all religions. The starting point and the final goal are equally common in their descriptions. Only paths vary.

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Path to God realisation is not strewn with roses. One cannot go all alone by oneself without a guide. Syed Ali, like all Indian saints, past and present, emphasises the importance of a spiritual preceptor without whose guidance it would be mere wild goose chase. "One who has no *pir* to guide him will be led from the true path by Satan."

The concepts of *Guru* and *Pir* have many similarities in this context. However learned a person may pretend to be, without proper guidance, he can at best be an ignorant pretender, nothing beyond, "unless an individual acquires even an external knowledge under a teacher, his discourses cannot be accepted and his judgment cannot be trusted, although he may be quite intelligent and well read. The same is the case," Syed Ali observes, "with those who pursue the path of the *tariqa*. An individual might perform ascetic exercises and mortifications for hundreds of years, but this would be no use unless he serves a man expert in *tariqa*." Syed Ali writes that the prophet Muhammad imbued Ali, the commander of the faithful, with it and the chain of all living saints (guides) goes back to him. This is the secret of the *tariqa* and the *silsila*. Syed Ali emphasises on the importance of a *Pir* or *Guru*. In *Risala Darweshiya* he "asserts that religious and spiritual guidance is a very specialised subject. Without the protection of a perfect and experienced person, he believes, no one can transcend the bondage and darkness of desire." In this connection, mention is also made of earlier saints who had stated that "the gains from the errors of the *Pir* were greater than what the disciple would gain on his own, even if he was right." (Ghazali).

God realisation is not possible without proper guide. Syed Ali says, "The essential realities of all devotions are only known to the prophets, physicians of the faith, the saints, the holy ones of the path of the *tariqa* and the *ulama*."

These path finders have a unique role to play in society. "They are endowed with knowledge and teach the disciples according to their capacity and prescribe remedies suitable to the spiritual ailments and the diseases of heart." He illustrates his point through the example of "worldly physicians" and observes that "although the medicines might be innumerable, only a particular medicine is prescribed for a particular nature

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of the disease, which is known only to the physician. The same is the case with the Sufi path, although the forms of devotion are innumerable and all of them are true, the particular disease of the heart of a devotee can be cured only through a particular devotion. He reminds his readers that the remedies of the sickness of heart are known only to the prophets, saints, religious scholars and the physicians of the faith."

Syed Ali warns against bookish knowledge of the religious leaders and insists that it must be realised knowledge. He warns against "senseless logic" and "vain talk" as philosophy. These ignorant pretenders pursue knowledge in order to gain fame but in fact they are not acquainted with the realities of religion. They ignore the teachings of the *Quran* and *Sunna* and do not care for the subtle points of Divine knowledge, and thus they misguide people."

The saint had a great advantage to proclaim this utter truth. He was a deeply learned man. There was hardly a scholar of his stature in whole of Kashmir at that time. At the same time he was a deeply devoted enlightened soul. So the combination of both head and heart gave him a rare knowledge of distinguishing the right guide from the wrong. Certainly he did it in the right way. Otherwise, ordinary people would get misled and dazzled by bookish knowledge. There are scholars who believed that Lalleshwari was influenced by the philosophy of one God as preached by the saint Syed Ali. "It is said that she was in the habit of wandering in a semi-nude or even nude condition, and when remonstrated with for such disregard for decency, she replied that there were no men in Kashmir, so whom should she fear. One day she saw Syed Ali at a distance, rushed to a baker's shop and jumped there into the blazing oven. After sometime she appeared from the mouth of the oven properly clad, met Syed Ali and became his constant companion."

(Temple: *The Word of Lalla*)

Pandit Anand Kaul also confirms this idea in *Life Sketch of Lalleshwari* (*op cit*). Temple tells further that to Lalla "all religions were at one in their essentials. This doctrine of the Mohammedan sufis she no doubt learnt in her association

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with Syed Ali Hamadani and perhaps other Mohammedan saints."

This may not be true. Dr Rafiqi clearly says "Some modern scholars, including Temple and Kaumudi, tend to indicate that Lalla conceived the idea that God is one reality from her association with Muslim saints such as Syed Ali. But these scholars appear to ignore the fact that this idea had long existed in Hinduism. Even as early as in the *Rig Vedic* hymns, we meet with the idea of One Reality. This is also the principal teaching of the *Upanishads*, that whatever is, is *Brahmins*; it is the source and the end of all. In the earlier *Upanishads Brahmin* seems generally to be thought of as an impersonal principle but in the *Svetasvatava Upanishad* which is comparatively late, this conception comes close to a true monotheism, where *Rudra* is conceived as *the One God*". Dr Rafiqui further says: "In fact, there is no trace of Islamic influence in Lalla's verses. Like Kabir or Nanak, she nowhere mentions *Allah*, though Grierson and Temple suspect that the word *jin* which Lalla uses in the following verses, is a reference to Arabic term *jin* (a demon, an angel, or a genius) she says

Shiva or Keshava, Lotus Lord or *Jin*
These be names. Yet takest Thou from the
All the ill that is my world within
He be Thou, or he, or he or he".

In these verses Lalla refers to God by various names. *Keshava* is *Vishnu* and Lotus Lord is *Brahma*. She says that by whatever name the worshipper may call the Supreme he is still the Supreme. It is not unlikely that Lalla would have used the Arabic term *jin* with this in mind, as jin is no attribute to God in Islam. In fact, *jin* is a Sanskrit word, the literal meaning of which is *victor* and it is used both for Buddha and Mahavira. Lalla is probably thinking of Buddha, in his heavenly form as conceived by late Mahayana mythology, for there was no Jains in Kashmir at the time, while Buddhism of the Tibetan type was still strong in outlying areas."

To this brilliant analysis Dr Rafiqi adds further "the sources of Lalla's religion were the indigenous school of

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Kashmir *Shaivism* and those of Hindu scholars and ascetics who came to Kashmir from time to time."

In spite of all these strong arguments by Dr Rafiqi, his learned analysis and other scholars' views, the influence of newly arrived Islam is very much there in Lalleshwari. There is nothing wrong in accepting the highest thoughts from the realised knowledge of other religions. In fact, religions are only paths—may be different. The goal is the same—God realisation. There is every possibility that Lalla's association with the Sufi saints added to her *Shaivism*. We should not forget a very significant point, Lalla did not read the *Rig Vedas* or the *Upanishads*. Whatever she uttered was her realised knowledge. There is every likelihood of her accepting the Oneness of God from the Sufi saints. It is perhaps futile to enter into academic arguments as to how much Lalleshwari was influenced by Syed Ali or Nand Rishi. The truth is that all the three, Syed Ali, Lalleshwari and Nand Rishi were enlightened souls, and were real spiritual path finders. They had been blessed by the self-realised knowledge and had the experience of the Supreme Being's presence in their heart. And they wanted human races to benefit from this divine realisation. The divine nectar was distributed by all the three in their sacred utterances to the people of Kashmir, and now through translated versions of their unique works in English, throughout the world. All seekers of real Truth will be equally benefited by their life-long works and that would go a long way in the God realisation movement throughout the world The beauty of the whole matter is that such great path finders do not belong to any particular sect, caste, creed or country. In the short life span of a human being with limited time, stress and strain of daily routine, it is really wrong to waste time to argue about the way they collected this heavenly nectar. The wise will only like to enjoy it to the brim.

It is just like a tourist who wants to reach Kutub Minar, the highest tower in Delhi. He may go by any route. It is unwise to fight with the cabman to reach him on the right spot. When different tourists reach the top of the tower they all find how the different routes reach them the same goal. It is only from the top the paths looks so tiny. From below it seems so long and hazardous. Exactly in the same manner,

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only an enlightened person will know, after tasting heavenly nectar, the differences on way were only flimsy. They were merely minor matters. Lalla, Syed Ali, Nand Rishi, must have exchanged notes. Syed Ali was an orthodox Muslim Sufi. He was not interested in *Kashmiri Shaivism*. There is nothing wrong in it. He had seen much of the world. He was an enlightened saint and was preaching in his own way. Lalla too had many divine experiences. She has given vivid descriptions. If she liked the message of the Prophet to be included into her philosophy of oneness there is nothing wrong. Exactly in the same spirit Nand Rishi too experimented with different experiences of God realisations. He admits that in the beginning he had faith only in *Allah*, but finally proclaims there is no difference between *Allah* and *Shiva*. There were quite a number of major differences too between Syed Ali and Lalleshwari. Syed Ali spent more than twenty one years only in pilgrimage. He went to Mecca and Medina as many as twelve times. On the contrary, both Lalleshwari and Nand Rishi did not encourage pilgrimages. They felt human heart was the dwelling citadel of God. Both Lalleshwari and Nand Rishi say "the path to attain heavenly bliss is only through inner quest for Truth."

Syed Ali left a *Silsila*, a *Sampradaya*, a chain of illustrious disciples to follow his works. On the contrary, Lalleshwari did not leave any such organisational set-up. Her *Vakyas* are her contributions to the spiritual realm of Kashmiris' life. "She did not give people any capsule religion, neither did she found any sect or cult. She told her experiences in her inimitable *Vayaks*. She loved God passionately. She sought Him longingly. She attained *Paramagati* (Supreme state) in her own life-time. She became a *jeewan mukta* (free from the tangle of life and death)." Syed Ali too was a great lover of the Almighty. All the three—Syed Ali, Lalleshwari and Nand Rishi were great saints and they played equally important roles in the Spirit of Indian culture. They all are immortal.

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LALLESHWARI

(1335 AD—1387 AD)

Kashmir, the crown of India had been a land of great religious experiments. The land of the Himalayas is the abode of great many saints representing so many religious sects and faiths and yet a harmonious spiritual heritage has bound them together for centuries.

According to Kalhan, till the Fourteenth Century, there were signs of Buddhistic touches in the valley. Even in the Muslim rulers' courts some Buddhist ministers were seen during this period. Tilakacharya, a Buddhist, was a minister in Zainulabidin's reign. According to P. N. K. Bamzai, "The long period of political instability which followed the peaceful and enlightened reign of Avantivarman (855 A.D.—883 A.D.) was responsible for the oscification of the predominant religion *Shaivism*, into elaborate and complicated rituals which dominated all social and cultural activities. *Shaktism* born out of love for *Durga* worship, had degenerated into grotesque forms of rites and ceremonies. *Vaishnavism* was not a strong element in the religious fabric of the valley, but in the Eleventh Century, it received further nourishment from the teachings of Ramanuja who travelled all the way from Madras to Kashmir to fight *Shaivism* at its fountain-head. And with the destruction of temples and images several Hindu kings like Harsha, as well as by Muslim Zealotes, Hindu worship was driven to the seclusion of the home or the 'natural' (*Svayambhu*) images—rocks or ice formations or springs. Sanskrit became the domain of the learned few, the common man having taken to a form of *Prakrit* which though retaining its essentials, was yet wholly different from the language of the Gods." (*History of Kashmir*).

Islamic thoughts of brotherhood of man reached the spot by this time "From a close contact between the two religions and their deep influence on each other, there resulted the evolution of what may be called Medieval Reformers or Mystics." (*Ibid*).

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As in whole of India, these mystics' ideas of universal brotherhood and their easier versions of God-realisation had attracted attention of the spiritually hungry masses. A new leadership came from saints from the two major religious groups, bringing a new message of unity and God-realisation. It was a period of religious fermentation and "a need had been felt for a new approach to religion embracing all creeds and castes and appealing to the heart rather than the head. Thanks to its rich religious and philosophic traditions, Kashmir rose to the occasion and produced a number of mystics and saints who by their teachings and their lives of complete self-abnegation were the living embodiments of true religion and morality."

This was a period when Kashmir was fortunate to produce great spiritual path-finders lik Lall Dev, Sheikh Nur-ud-Din, Bam-ud-Din, Zain-ud-Din, Latif-ud-Din Nasrud and Qiyam-ud-Din. This whole lineage of religious thought gives India some of the finest and subtlest expressions of self-realized Truth. These great mystics never restricted their visions to any particular sect or religion. Their only goal was God-realisation. From their songs—immortal messages of divine experiences—it is clear that they must have been enlightened souls. This whole lineage is known in the Kashmiri tradition—*The Rishi order*. In his *Sufism in Kashmir from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, Dr A. Q. Rafiqui gives a detailed account of religious movement in Kashmir during the Fourteenth Century. Talking about Nur-ud-Din he tells us, "By this time a new *Bhakhti* movement, set in train by Lalla, had started in Kashmir. She was a source of inspiration for Nur-ud-Din".

All historians agree that the greatest among these saints was Lalla or Laleshwari. She was fondly addressed as Mother Lalla or Lall Ded. As it is observed by historians she "profoundly influenced the thoughts and life of her contemporaries and whose sayings still touch a Kashmiri's ear, as well as the chords of his heart, and are freely quoted by him as maxims on appropriate occasions".

Detailed accounts of the life of the mystic is not available. Dr Rafiqui tells us "Lalla's life is shrouded in myth and legend. It is said that she came of a well to do family of Brahmins of Pompur, and that right from her childhood she was given to an

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ascetic life. However, she was married to a Brahmin boy in the same village. Her mother-in law was cruel and her husband ignored her".

Almost in the same breath the great *History of Kashmir* records, "Lalla was born in about the middle of the 14th Century of the Christian era in the time of Sultan Ala-ud-Din. Lalla's parents lived at Pandrenthan (ancient Puranadhisthana) some four and a half miles to the South-east of Srinagar. She was married at an early age, but was cruelly treated by her mother-in-law who nearly starved her. This story is preserved in a Kashmiri proverb, whether they killed a big sheep or a small one, Lalla had always a stone for her dinner—an allusion to her mother-in-law's practice of putting a humpy stone on her platter and covering it thinly with rice, to make it look quite a big heap to others. And yet she never murmured."

The only person in the family who had some sympathy for the poor girl was the father-in law. When he came to know about the whole thing he strongly protested. But this instead of helping her, further deteriorated the situation. The repression was doubled. And she was forced to leave the house. Whether she was turned out of the house by the in-laws or she left it on her own hardly makes any difference. According to Dr Rafiqui, "Because of her mystical tendencies Lalla failed to conform to the established social practice and was turned out of her husband's house. Thereupon she started roaming from place to place in semi-nude state. Probably it was disappointment in love and the domestic life that turned Lalla into an ascetic". This story seems to be probable. It was natural that after the father-in-law's strong protest all turned terribly hostile. "This incident invited more curses on Lalla. Her mother-in-law poisoned the ears of her son against his wife with all sorts of stories. Ultimately, the anomalies and cruelties of worldly life led her to renunciation and she discovered liberty and equality in the life of the spirit". (*History of Kashmir, op.cit*)

Lalleshwari was one of the greatest lady-saints of India. She appeared in the spiritual arena of Kashmir most probably in the Fourteenth Century. It was a historic Century for

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Kashmir. Islamic message of brotherhood of man started getting popular. The Islamic ideas spread very fast. Sanskrit was the state language for some time. Due to the advent of Muslims the Persian language started getting popular.

As Sanskrit language went into the backgrond the literary personalities of Kashmir thought of expressing their ideas through their mother tongue 'Kashmiri'. Those who were the pioneers included Lalleswari popularly known as Lal Ded, was at the top. She expressed herself admirably in projecting her thoughts on mundane and super-mundane things.

With the spread of Islamic thoughts the traditional ideas were gaining strength side by side because centuries before Kashmir had happened to be a great centre of Buddhism and its philosophy. After some time when Buddhism lost its hold due to the spread of *Vedantic* philosophy in Inda, it was in the beginning of Ninth Century AD when in Kashmir a new philosophical thought came into being, which is popularly known as *Trika* or *Shaiva Siddhanta.* One has to bear in mind that despite the Muslim rule and Islamic culture the traces of Buddhism and *Shaiva Siddhanta* were still a living force. This is the reason why there is great similarity of Muslim *Sufis* and Hindu *Rishis* in their approach to spiritualism. Such Muslim saints were generally known as *Rishis or Babas*. There is ample testimony to this fact in the treatise of Daud Mushketi's *Asrar-Al-Brar*, and *Ain-i-Akbari* and in the book of Sir Walter Lawrence's *Valley of Kashmir.* Besides, Sir Richard Temple has elaborated on this fact in his book *Lal Vakya* or *Lal's message.*

Althoug Lal Ded was a Hindu and followed her own faith in her verses she was equally influenced by Muslim *Sufis* whose thoughts are to some extent based on *Upanishadic* ideas.

It is a pity that most of this literature is lost to us but there are a few examples still existent which clearly throw light on this synthesis. For instance, in one of the verses by Samad Mir who died on January 10, 1959 it is said—

Won Samad Miran Shastar hue

Par Omsu Par Omsu Par Omsu

Samad Mir had taken recourse to *Shastras* and he advised his followers to recite *Omsu Omsu.*

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The way Hindu and Muslim *Sufis* have sung praises in in honour of Lal Ded bears testimony to the fact that she also did express the same thoughts as most of the *Sufis* gave the same message to their followers.

One of the most important spiritual luminaries of Kashmir, Shamas Fakir (1843 A.D.) says about the mystic Saint—

Kor Lala ikrata Akash Pranas

Zan Milanav Bhagwans Saeet

Chaka Gaya Lalamach Shurayar Sranas

Pala Tame kor zagi Tika Tar Tarnas

Wupdesh karne Gaya Nand Rishanas

Rindav Duphas Aani Urfan

Chyapa Chiparas Gyundun Shah Hamdanas

Zan Milanav Bhagwans Saeet

Lal Ded created unison between the Sun and the universal Soul. Apparenty she went to Shurayer for ablutions but she did not only walk across river Jhelum but merged herself with the Supreme and broke the bondage of life and death. She had illumined Shaikh Nur-ud-Din Nurani, popularly known as *Nand Rishi*, and the devotees had taken this *Upadesh* as universal Truth. Lal Ded had in the same manner played hide and seek with Shah Handan, one of the greatest Muslim Saints of Kashmir.

Many of the facts about Lal Ded are obscure. So it is very difficult to present an authentic version about her life and message, if not her achievements. Some important facts have come down to us by tradition. There is no definite date available on the life of Lalleshwari. The whole story about her is based only on inference. Bamzai "says she was there during the reign of Sultan Ala-ud-Din." His eminent father Ananda Kaul in his research paper on *Life Sketch of Lalleshwari* (*Indian Antiquary 1921*) also tells us that she was born during the reign of Sultan Ala-ud-Din (1348 A. D.—1354A. D.). *Sufi* (*Kashmir* II p. 383) gives the year of birth of the Saint as 1335 A.D.

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According to Jonaraja, a scholar, "Once upon a time the prince, Shihab-ud-Din (1354 A.D.-1373A.D.) was wandering for amusement in the forest of Vakpushta, when he saw a circle of *Yoginis* in the caves of a mountain. His friends Udayashi and Chandradamara also saw them. The leader of the *Yoginis* recognised the prince and sent him a cup of liquor with incantation and blessing." A number of other scholars like Mishkati and Wahhal agree with Jonaraja. They are convinced that the leader of the *Yoginis* was Lalla. The prince saw the *Yogini* in her matured vision. This also may be true. Dr. Rafiqui also gives these details and the dates are also the same but he gives (in his foot note p. 144), the period as Fifteenth Century.

Anand Kaul, P.N.K. Bamzai, Sufi give the date as Fourteenth Century. Sufi's exact date of the Saint's birth in 1335 A.D. is perhaps nearest the mark. Prof. Jiyalal Kaul, an authority of Kashmir's Culture and Religion, however, gives the date 1320 A.D. to 1372 A.D. Perhaps, 1335 is the most acceptable date for Lalleswari. Otherwise *Nand Rishi* (1377 A.D.-1439 A.D.) could not have met her. We may, however, accept Prof. Kaul's theory of longevity of the saint i.e. fiftytwo. Then the saint's period comes to 1335 A.D.—1387 A.D. The only fact known to all about Lalla's date is that she was senior to Nur-ud-Din. We may agree with the scholar who says, "All that can be affirmed of her with certainty is that she flourished between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and that she was a senior contemporary of Nur-ud-Din."

About the spiritual preceptor of Lalleswari there were no two opinions and Sidh Srikarta is universally known to have initiated her. About his spiritual attainments nothing is known. It is only incidentally mentioned that she found her Guru in Sidh Srikarta whom she ultimately excelled in spiritual attainments :

Gav Tsatha guras Khasithary Trust var ditan-Diva

"The disciple surpassed the Guru; O God, grant me a similar boon." It is also recorded that she pursued *yoga* under Sidh Srikarta until she succeeded in reaching the abode of nectar. But she did not stop there. All her life she practised

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meditation and attained great spiritual power which helped her to reshape the spiritual life and *moulding the character of her people* in Kashmir. She taught them tolerance. She had set up a tradition of human love. Even to-day she is unsurpassed. Sir George Grierson kept India in a great debt of gratitude by compiling the collections of the sayings of Lalleswari. He took pains to edit the collected works and published them sixty years ago (1920). This was well received by the scholars and the deep message of the saint stirred minds of many. Four years later in 1924 Sir Richard Carnac Temple published a translation in English with detailed teachings of Lalleswari. It was perhaps the first study in depth. In a learned research on the Saint some details were published on the Saint's works. It records "Lal Ded's sayings are clear coherent, pointed and vigorous and reflect deep spiritual experiences. Spoken in old Kashmiri archaic terminology, they are modern in impact because they are alive and forceful even today. These uttarances have opened new vistas of communication between the intelligentsia and the masses. Hence Lal Ded has been characterised as *harbinger of a new age*. The similies Lal Ded used are folksy : the metaphors, puns and alliterations are the very fibre of her spontaneity. The sayings became popular and were passed by word of mouth for decades."

Many of the sayings of Lal Ded lost the rich philosophical cannotations and the nuances, for these were put in black and white much later, not in Kashmiri, but in Persain. Thus the original, through translation, got inextricably confused and unconsciously distorted. Many spurious sayings were also included in the collection.

Lal Ded's sayings were recorded for the first time in 1914 by Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri from an oral rendering of Dharamadas Darvesh of Handwara. He handed them over to Sir George A. Grierson for whom it was the basis of the publication *Lalla Vakyani*. In 1920, Grierson Lionel D. Barnett edited *Lalla Vakyani*, translated 109 sayings of Lal Ded. In 1924 Richard Carnac Temple wrote *The Word of Lalla—The Prophetess*, rendering these sayings into English verse, besides explaining Lal Ded's religion. Anand Kaul Bamzai, a noted Kashmiri antiquarian, wrote *Lalla Vogeshwari*

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Her Life and Sayings, adding 75 more *vakh* (sayings) to the one in the possession of Grierson.

There are many interesting and thought-provoking ideas associated with the state of nude appearance of Lalla. One day as she was walking naked, a number of young urchins followed her. They were jeering at her. A vendor who was selling cloth intervened out of compassion. Lalla asked him to give her two pieces of ordinary cloth, equal in weight. She put them on both sides of her shoulder and again started her usual journey. Many respectfully saluted her, many jeered at her. "For every such greeting she had a knot in the cloth for the salutation in the piece on the right, and for the gibes in the piece on the left. In the evening after her round, she returned the pieces to the vendor and had them weighed. Neither had, of course, gained or lost by the knots. She thus brought home to the vendor, and her disciples, that mental poise should not be shaken by the manner people greeted or treated a person."

About Lalla's roaming in naked or semi-naked state there are legends in Kashmir. Temple tells us of one such in *The Word of Lalla.*

Dance then Lalla. clothed but by the air,
Sing then, Lalla, clad but in the sky.
Air and sky: what garment is more fair ?
'Cloth', saith custom doth that sanctify ?

(Temple: *The Word of Lalla*, P.173)

Lalleswari did not have any faith in ritualistic performances for God-realisation. She did not believe in *Karma* or rebirth. She says:

God does not want meditations and austerities.
Through love alone canst thou reach the Abode of Bliss.
Thou mayst be lost like salt in water,
Still it is difficult for thee to know God.'

Lalleshwari was a symbol of equality. She finds no difference between man and man. No difference in caste and creed. She would share food with all:

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I renounced fraud, untruth, deceit,
I taught my mind to see the one,
In all my fellow-men.
How could I then discriminate
Between man and man ?
And not accept the food
Offered to me by
My brother man.

In the service of God one must dedicate oneself selflessly without any expectation. Whatever difficulties may come on way must be overcome.

Let them jeer or cheer me;
Let anybody say what he likes,
Let good persons worship me with flowers,
What can any one of them gain, I being pure ?
If the world talks ill of me
My heart shall harbour no ill-will
If I am a true worshipper of God,
Can ashes leave a stain on a mirror ?

The Saint stressed the importance of purity and morality. Character building is the most important factor for God-realisation. Because of her sterling character Lalla got so great moral power and spiritual attainment that she did not care for the whole world.

Lalleswari did not believe in idolatary either. This may be the influence of Sankaracharya's *Adwaita* philosphy. May be, this she derived from Sidh Srikarta, her *Guru* or may be this was due to the influence of the *Sufi* Saints, who by this time got popular in Northern India in particular.

Idol is of stone, temple is of stone;
Above (temple) and below (idol) are one;
Which of them will thou worship,
O foolish Pandit ?
Cause thou the union of mind with soul.

The protest against idolatry is straight and blunt. The

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priest had been the subject of bitter criticism by the great saints of the *Bhakti* movement. There were straight allegations against the traditionally professional priests. Even great Saints like Kabir, Dadu, Rajjab criticised them for conducting a mechanical prayer without any God-realisation, There is no touch of love in this artificial process. In the same poem she continues :

"Let *Prana* and the Mind unite
Feed it whenever it feels famished
Fie on your fasts and religious rites;
Do good, therein your duty lies;
Who slays the high way robbers three,
Greed, Lust and Pride,
and yet; utter humility,
serves his fellow men,
He truly seeks out the Lord,
Disregarding as worthless ashes
all other things".

Lalleshwari revolted against *traditional* religious superstitions :

Oh Mind why hast thou become
intoxicated at another's expense ?
Why hast, thou mistaken true for untrue ?
Thy little understanding, hath made thee
attached to others religion;

Indifferent to social criticism, she was fearless. She talked so boldly against traditional convention because all these ideas came to her as self-realised Truth. Otherwise how almost an unlettered girl married to a callous family could utter such high philosophy ? She was definitely blessed. She talked with authority on the circle of birth and death, such an intricate and subtle problem of Truth explorers. She had been an enlightened path finder. She had complete control over her head and heart, the two great necessities for God-realisation. She had vision of God and so was sure of her convictions.

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I saw and found I am in every thing,
I saw God effulgent in every thing,
After hearing and plusing, see *Shiva*
The House is His alone; who am I, Lalla ?

Lalleshwari was in tune with Infinity. She found herself in unison with *Shiva*. This was the highest stage of blissfull God-realisation and perhaps without any effort or any scriptural background.

Sachchidananda rupohsmi, Shivohang Shivohang.

I am that great blissful *Shiva*.

Lalleshwari said that *Shiva* pervades everything. She said categorically after her enlightenment that all religions are true. The paths may be different, the goal is the same. Lalleshwari sings :

Shiv chuy thali thali roza,

Me zan Hindu ta Musalman

Truk ay chuk pan panun parzanav

Say chay Sahibas sato zaniy zan

Shiva pervades every place and thing. Do not differentiate between Hindu and Musalman. If thou art intelligent, recognise thine own self; that is the true aquaintance with God.

This is again an expression of the highest upanishadic thought. Know thyself, *tatvamasi*. That is the highest Truth. Self realisation is the core to God-realisation. At that stage there is no difference between Self and God.

Although Lalla made many utterances against meditation, it is not practically possible for any saint to achieve this Truth and enlightenment without meditation. She must have meditated deeply herself. What she criticised was the pretentious rituals and prayers without any heart. She protested against mirage.

Like the greatest saints of the land, Lalleshwari proclaimed that it was not necessary to run after pilgrimages or temples or

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mosques. Every human heart is a dwelling temple of God. This spirit gives a clearer view of their approach to serve every man as a manifestation of God. This brings a harmony in thinking and saves us from misunderstanding. Lalla's song about it is :

Why do you grope thus, like the blind;
Pray, doubt not what I say to you.
If you are wise, enter within
And see the Lord Himself in thee
You need not search Him here and there.

About her God-realisation there is a beautiful poem by herself :

The holy books disappearing
The mystic formula remains,
The mystic formula vanishing
Mind alone is left,
The void merges into void.
The Saint was conscious of her journey. She sings :
By the highway I came
By the highway I return not.
So I find me
Still on the embankment
Not having gone even half the way
And the day is done,
The light has failed
I search my pockets
But not a cowrie find,
What shall I pay for the ferry fee.

This ferry fee had been a "common" expression for many other saints too. They evaluate their own experiences. One of the greatest contributions of Lalleshwari is her catholic outlook. Her outstanding image is the mutual respect she offered to other faiths. It may be due to saints like Lalleshwari, Sheikh Nur-ud-Din, Shah Hamadan, that Kashmir has the highest feeling of harmony, emotional unity and catholicity outlook for all these six centuries.

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A great worshipper of *Shiva*, the Saint sung :
Shiva abides in all that is every where
Then don't discriminate between a *Hindu* or
a *Musalman*;
If thou art wise know thyself,
That is true knowledge of the Lord.

Regarding *Sakar* and *Nirakar*, forms or formless she gave an example to show that Truth reveals in different forms :

Cold conceals water;
And turns it into ice,
But on reflection
Are revealed as one.

Lalleshwari did not believe in idolatry and yet she was a worshipper of *Shiva*. It is perhaps only in Kashmir that natural idols like ice-formations at Amarnath or mountain pieces in natural shape of *Shivalinga* are worshipped even today. Devotees, irrespective of caste and creed gather there to offer their prayers. Lalla was a worshipper of *Shiva* who symbolises *Satyam*, *Shivam*, *Sundaram*—Truth and beauty. To this we may be permitted to add *mangalam*. A saint had described Him as *Snantang Shivam Subimalam*, an incarnation of purity, serene light. And to Lalleshwari :

Shiva is with a fine net spread out
He permeates the mortal coils
If thou, whilst living,
Canst not see Him, how canst thou when dead
Take out sell from self,
after pondering over it.

The whole Truth revealed to Lalleshwari spontaneously and was definitely not the reflection of the ideas of the *Bhakti* movement. It has been truly observed by a historian, "She (Lalla) was the first amongst the long list of saints who preached medieval mysticism which later embraced the whole of India. It must be remembered that Ramananada's teachings and those of who came after him could not have affected

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Lalla, because Ramananda flourished between 1400 A.D.—1470 A.D. while Kabir sang his famous *Dohas* beeween 1440 A.D. and 1518 A.D. and Guru Nanak between 1469 A.D. and 1538 A.D. Tulsidas did not come on the scene till 1532 A.D.—1623 A.D. whereas Mira flourished much later."

Meera did not flourish much later. She was almost a contemporary of Lalleshwari. Whereas Meera was a worshipper of *Giridhari Krishna*, Lalla was a worshipper of *Shiva*. Both were married women. Both were subjected to torture in their in-laws families. Both had God-realisation. Both had been gifted with poetic talents. But Meera's message did not reach the valley till then. Neither did the voice of Lalla reach Meera. Both played equally important roles in the spiritual lives of millions of their countrymen.

In *the word of Lalla*, edited by Temple, we know some of the teachings of the Saint. "Self denial, purity of life are the keynote of her sayings. She rejected the established religious dogmas and rituals." Was she influenced by Muslim saints such as Saiyid Ali Hamadani ? Some modern scholars, including Temple and Muhibbul Hasan think so. But at the same time Temple, whom Muhibbul Hasan follows, acknowledges that Lalla's association with Saiyid Ali is based on legend. It is most likely that the legend was concocted either to glorify the influence of Saiyid Ali or to counteract the popular belief that Lalla influenced Sheikh Nur-ud-Dun. There is in fact no trace of Islamic influence in Lalla's teachings, although some modern scholars, such as Grierson and Temple have in vain tried to find some. Indeed it was not the Muslim saints who influenced Lalla, but she who influenced a section of the Kashmiri saints, the *Rishis* through Nur-ud-Din. Nur-ud-Din was a junior contemporary of Lalla and though the tales of Nur-ud-Din's encounter with Lalla may be taken as mere fabrications, at least, they reveal that Nur-ud-Din was popularly considered to have had some association with Lalla.

"There is no doubt that Lalla had tremendously influenced the life and teaching of *Nanda Rishi*, the affectionate name given to Nur-ud-Din by his Hindu and Muslim saints.

Lalleshwari represents the secular thought of Kashmir. Throughout ages Kashmir has been secular. It has been

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advocating co-existence of all religious thoughts. *Shaivism* flourished in Kashmir. At the same time *Vaishnavism* was not neglected. *Durga* is regularly worshipped in the valley. *Shakta* cult is very much there. The ancient shrine of *Khir Bhavani* is a place where people of all faiths congregate. In true spirit of Kashmir, Lalleshwari expresses an appreciation and assimilation of all. She "fills her teachings with many truths that are common to all religious philosophy. There are in many touches of *Vaishnavism* the great rival of *Shaivism*, much that is strongly reminiscent of the doctrines and methods of the *Mohammaden Sufis* who were in India and Kashmir well before her days and teachings that might be Christian with Biblical analogies, though Indian knowledge of Christianity must have been very remote and indirect at her date."

Lalleshwari was a saint of the masses. She was the first to compose her sayings in Kashmiri. The local admirers and disciples, even the lowly and the unlettered, could follow her. In the process she enriched the Kashmiri language. The history of the Kashmiri language records with gratitude. "She thus laid the foundations of the rich Kashmiri literature and folk-lore. More than thirty per cent of the Kashmiri idioms and proverbs derive their origin from her *vakyas*. These *vakyas* or sayings are an aggregate of *yoga* philosophy and *Shaivism*, expressive of high thought and spiritual truth, precise, and sweet. Her quatrains are now rather difficult to understand as the language has undergone so many changes, and references to special *yogic* and philosophic terms are numerous therein."

"They explain the *Shaiva* philosophy of Kashmir through the Kashmiri dialect; they exemplify the synthesis of cultures for which Kashmir has always been noted."

According to Lalleshwari :

In these evil times *cloth* Nature bow
Unto them that walk in wrongful ways.
Autumn pears and apples ripen now
With the apricots of summer days.
In the coming days of shame and wrath
Mother and her daughter, hand in hand,

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Strangers to accost shall wander forth;
Men and women in an evil band.
(Temple, *op. cit, p 219, poem 92*)

Who are they that wreathes of flowers bring ?
What are the flowers that at the Feet they lay ?
Water that they on the Image fling ?
What the spell that *Shankar's* Self shall sway.
(Temple, *The Word of Lalla, p 188, poem 39*)

Lalleshwari says like an enlightened soul

Passionate, with longing in mine eyes,
Searching wide, and seeking nights and days,
Lo : I beheld the Truthful One, the wise,
Here in mine own House to fill my gaze.
(Temple, *op. cit. p 167, poem 3*)

Sheikh Nuruddin, the most important among the contemporary spiritual path finders paid glowing tributes to this greatest saint of Kashmir.

Dr. A.Q. Rafiqi tells us, "That Nurud Din was influenced by Lalla's personality is quite clear from one of his sayings, in which he declares Lalla a great Soul. He eulogises her spiritual attainments and, despairlng of surpassing them him-self, strives only to equal them.

That Lalla of Padmanpur
Who had drunk nectar
She is the Avatar and Yogini
O God, bestow the same (spiritual power) on me.

(*Nur Nama, p 53, poem 33*)

The learned scholar says "The personalities of Lalla and Nurud Din are so mixed up that it is impossible to separate them. But there seems little doubt that Nurud Din drew inspiration from Lalla, even if he did not actually become her disciple."

(*Sufism in Kashmir, p 147*)

It has been truly observed that *the Lalla Vakyas* or sayings

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of Lalla are the "current coin of quotation" in Kashmir. The impact of these immortal sayings are felt even today.

Lalla's path is not an easy one; although she denounces rituals, she insists on purity, devotion and self-search. She herself had a long journey to *Siddhi.*

Lalleshwari gives an account of her spiritual realisation step by step. She sings

Every moment
I taught *Omkar* to my mind
I was myself reading
And myself hearing
From *So'ham* (I am He)
I cut off *aham* (I am)
Then did I, Lalla
Reach the place of illumination.

Till the ego is fully won over, till one feels humble and surrenders completely to God, God-realisation and inner enlightenment are not possible.

The saint gives further details of her spiritual experiences :

I Lal, started forth in the hope of
Blooming like a cotton flower,
But the cleaner and the *carder*
Dealt me many a kick.
The spinning woman
Spun up out of me
A gossamer thread
And when the washerman dashed me
Upon the washing stone,
And profusely rubbed me with
The fuller's earth and soap,
And the tailor piled his scissors
Upon me piece by piece
Then did I, Lal,
Attain to the highest state of wisdom.

Lalleshwari deserves a high place in the history of Indian culture and Indian philosophy. Her role as a great path finder

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has yet to be assessed by historians against the background of Indian spiritual movement. A study in depth on such a great saint has yet to be undertaken. Her voice of unity of religious thoughts, her message of harmony, particularly of moral values and on purity of head and heart will contribute much in the emotional integration.

It has been most aptly observed about her, in the *History of Kashmir* (*op. cit.* 498).

> "The greatness of Lalla lies in giving the essence of her experiences in the course of her *yoga* practices through the language of the common man. She has shown very clearly the evolution of the human being, the theory of *nada*, the worries and miseries of a *jeeva* and the way to keep them off. The different stages of *yoga* with the awakening of the *Kundalini* and the experiences at the six *Plexi* have been elucidated by her.
>
> "Much can, indeed be said on her work as a poet and more perhaps, on her work in the spiritual realm. But at a time when the world was suffering from conflict—social, political and economic—her efforts in removing the differences between man and man need to be emphasised. The composite culture and thought she preached and the Order she founded was an admixture of the non-dualistic philosophy of *Shaivism* and *Islamic Sufism*. As long back as the Fifteenth Century she preached non-violence, simple living and high thinking, and became thus *Lalla Arifa* for the Mohammadens and Lalleshwari for the Hindus."

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SHAIKH NURUD DIN—NANDRISHI

(1377 AD—1439 AD)

One of the greatest saints of Kashmir born during the days of Lalleshwari, loved and respected alike by Hindus and Muslims, was Shaikh Nurud Din. He is affectionately also known as *Nand Rishi*..

He was born in 1377 A. D. at Kaimuh, a village two miles to the west of the important town Bijbihara, ancient Vijayesa, twenty-six miles from Srinagar. According to PNK Bamzai "His ancestors belonged to a noble family of Kishtwar and had emigrated to the valley. His father, Salar Sanz was a pious man and came under the spiritual influence of a Sufi saint Yasman Rishi who arranged his marriage to Sadra Maji. The child of their union was Nand Rishi, the great founder of the order of the Rishis of Kashmir."

(*History of Kashmir*, p. 486)

The Shaikh was greatly influenced by the teachings and personality of Lalleshwari. He had composed songs to her glory describing "Lalla of Padmanpur who had drunk nectar" as an "Avatar and Yogini". She was his ideal and the saint has prayed to the Almighty, "Oh God, bestow the same spiritual power on me."

(*Nur Nama*, p. 169)

According to one authority "he (Nand Rishi) eulogises her spiritual attainments and despairing of surpassing them himself, strives only to equal them." There is no doubt that Lalleshwari had influenced a large number of Sufi saints of contemporary Kashmir and greatest among them was Shaikh Nurud Din or Nand Rishi. It is recorded in the "History of Sufism in Kashmir" that "The personalities of Lalla and Nurud Din are so mixed up that it is impossible to separate them. But there seems little doubt that Nurud Din drew inspiration from Lalla, even if he did not actually become her disciple."

(*Sufism in Kashmir*, p 147)

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Like many great spiritual path finders in India the Rishi showed signs of extra-ordinary feelings of God-realisation right from his childhood. "He held himself aloof from the daily affairs of the family and though apprenticed in several trades, showed no inclination for any one of them. Finally he gave up the world, lived in a cave for twelve years practising penances which reduced him almost to a skeleton. His fame as a saint and the glory of his spiritual attainments travelled far and wide, attracting to him a great number of followers." They were from both faiths—Hindus and Muslims alike.

Nand Rishi was unlettered. He could not read and write. But to the astonishment of all he would rattle learned poetic pieces spontaneously. These effortless utterances "furnish Kashmiri literature with gems having both a terrestrial as well as celestial meaning. Concise and objective in their approach, they have become stamped in people's memories. They have been collected and preserved in two volumes called the *Rishi Nama* and *Nur Nama*; but because of the transliteration in the Persian alphabet, many of them are not easily deciphered."

Nand Rishi's contribution in the Hindu Muslim unity has been unique. Like Lalla, the saint does not stress importance of rituals. He insists on one's being pure-hearted and good to all. He must have experienced enlightenment. As his poems express

> The cave seems to me to be a celestial castle
> The quilt seems to me to be a silken garment
> I play with the rats as if they were creatures of
> good omen to me
> One year seems to me to be one single hour.

In *Nur Nama*, the saint proclaims,

> Searching far and wide in vain
> Lo ! I found Him in my own country

(*Nur Nama*, p. 155)

This "celestial castle" "this "own country", were nothing but his own heart. The heart must be pure to welcome Him, like Lalla, the saint proclaimed.

Just like Lalleshwari, Nand Rishi did not encourage mechanical muttering of *mantras* as normally done at the guidance

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of professional priests. Almost in the same language as Lalla, the saint criticises the activities of the priests. These artificial rites lead people nowhere, both Lalla and Nand Rishi confirm.

Nand Rishi writes

I saw a priest blowing out fire,
Beating a drum to others;
The priests have nice big turbans on their heads;
They walk about daintily dressed.
Dressed in priestly robes they indulge in mutton,
They run away with cooking pots under their arms.

Like Lalleshwari the saint sarcastically describes the artificial prayers and false religious rites by them

The rosary is like a snake;
Thou bendest it on seeing the disciples;
Thou hast eaten six platefuls, one like another;
If thou art a priest, then who are robbers ?

About the state of affairs prevalent in the State, the saint writes

During this Iron Age I found liars prospering,
In the house of the pious I found grief born of
poverty.

Both Lalleshwari and Nand Rishi insist their disciples on truthfulness. Character-building is the first step to God-realisation. That was a great foundation laid by Nand Rishi and his ideal saint Lalleshwari. The dig at the priest eating mutton was mainly because of the influence of Lalleshwari's preaching. The great saint strictly opposed killing of animals and Nand Rishi strongly supported her through his preachings. Both abhorred killing sheep to appease gods. Both brushed aside visits to shrines. Both discouraged their disciples and admirers reciting scriptures like parrots without understanding their true significance and without paying any devotion truly.

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Nand Rishi sings

Do not go to shaikh, and priest and *mullah*,
Do not feed the cattle on *arkhor* (poisonous) leaves;
Do not shut thyself up in mosques or forests,
Enter thine own body with breath controlled in
communion with God.

Perhaps like Lalleshwari, Nand Rishi too practised *yogic* exercises, at least the song hints to that.

Just like Lalleshwari, the saint ridicules rites without devotion.

By bowing down thou shalt not become a Rishi.
The pounder in the rice mill did never raise up its head,
By bathing, the mind will not be clean,
The fish and otter never ascend the bank.

(Anand Kaul : "*The Life of Nand Rishi*",
Indian Antiquary. 1930)

God realisation cannot come to anybody all of a sudden. One must constantly practise prayers with heart and soul. The saint emphatically observes that a man must offer prayers to God regularly immediately after he atains the age of reason. It is absolutely ridiculous to think that one may leave God realisation for old age. Why so, if one does not turn towards God in the vigour of youth, how can one do so in old age?"

In *Rishi Nama* he clearly says "Understand that *sunt* (spring i. e. youth) is the best time (to worship).

It is better to be ready right from the beginning.
Do not lag behind, youth is an illusion
What shall a man do if he misses his chance early?"

God-realisation depends on disciplined nature. One must control one's mind.

The shaikh was an incarnation of harmony and believed strongly in co-existence of all other religions. The saint sings

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We belong to the same parents
Then why this difference ?
Let Hindus and Muslims (together)
Worship God alone.
We come to this world like partners
We should share our joys
and sorrows together.

(*Nur Nama*, p 42)

Like all sages and seers of the ancient days, Nand Rishi asks his disciples and followers to shun greed. There is no joy as in renunciation. That is the last word of Indian philosophy. Nand Rishi joins these great sages when he says

Desire is like the knotted wood of the forest,
It cannot be made into planks, beams or into cradles;
He who cut and felled it,
Will burn it to ashes.

The whole philosophy of Lalla and Nand Rishi rests on love. Love is every thing.

"Love and intense devotion to God form the basis of Nurud Din's utterances. His devotion is complete and exclusive absorption in God and indifference to all except Him. He advocates the suppression of all other preoccupations and the abandonment of wordly cares. The lover, according to Nurud Din, is one who cares neither for spiritual nor fleshy pleasures, but only for the contemplation of the Beloved (God)."

The saint says

The lover is he who burns with love
Whose self shines like gold.
When man's heart lights up with the flame of love,
Then shall he reach *la-makan*.

Like all saints of the *Bhakti* movement Nand Rishi proclaimed that one has to completely surrender himself to God to have His revelation. It is only by full identification with Him that one feels His presence. "He is everywhere, not confined to one place or another. All branches of knowledge are nothing

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but the commentary upon the proclamation of faith. There is no God but Allah. If one truly seeks for God, everything but Allah becomes worthless. One who recognises himself, recognises God. When I was able to recognise my own self, I was able to recognise God; both loss and gain became identical to me and the distinction between life and death disappeared."

(Dawud Miskati—*Asrarul Abrar*, p 67)

Baba Nasib tells us in *Rishi Nama* that the saint was was so much convinced about the omnipresence of God that He must take complete charge of one who surrenders to Him. Nothing can succeed in this world without His will. "One must trust in God and recognise that no human endeavour can succeed withut His help."

The saint did not care to go for higher formal education. He failed in his business adventures too. The affectionate mother was worried about the future of the son. She asked the son softly, "how wlll you exsit ? Who will support you ?"

Promptly came the reply, "Bread is provided by God, and trades and professions are only one of the means of getting it. A slave of God should think only of worshipping Him caring nothing for food and drink."

In *Nur Nama*, the saint sings

No one takes anything from him to whom God has given,
Time and chance are only a means to an end.
For one, whom God will abandon, no one can provide,
Neither intelligence nor high caste shall help him.

(*Nur Nama*, p 38)

He is convinced of His *karuna*, great mercy Finally. he is convinced of His omniscience.

He was, He is and He shall be,
So remember Him constantly here;
He will remove all (your) anxieties,
So come to your senses at once.

(*Ibid*, p 23)

The great Lord has created man but man forgets Him at

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every stage. He is under the wrong impression that he is doing every thing himself. He is merely a tool in His hands. The saint says clearly, "although God has bestowed every thing upon mankind, we are ungrateful and indifferent to His worship. He remembers us. He provides our livelihood. He preserves our health, but we are lukewarm in worship."

(*Rishi Nama*)

For every human being prayer is a must. Without constant prayer it is difficult to concentrate on even earthly things. The saint says, "To worship is a duty imposed on all creatures." Once when the Shaikh was in his cave at the village of Kaimuh, his mother came and asked solicitiously how he was putting up with the insects and rats in the cave. The Shaikh replied "They too are worshipping." He added "whatever creature has been given life by the grace of God, exists only for the purpose of worshipping Him. Whatever has the power to speak has a duty to worship Him."

(*Rishi Nama*)

Like a great enlightened one, Nand Rishi says in *Nur Nama*

There is one God
But with a hundred names.
There is not a single blade of grass,
Which does not worship Him.
First I became certain that there is no God but Allah,
Then I made myself (acquainted) divine revelation
First I forgot myself and yearned after God
Then I reached *la-makan*.

(*Nur Nama*, p 154)

Like Lalleshwari and the other stalwarts of the *Bhakti* era, Shaikh Nurud Din felt that God realisation was a matter of inner search and deepest attachment only to the Almighty. He, like Lalla asks his followers to be disciplined first. "True devotion to God lays in leading a disciplined life. It availed men nothing to carry out the rites and rituals of religion in a cold and mechanical manner," he insists. In an oft-quoted song the saint says.

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Having washed thy face, thou hast called the believers to prayers
How can I know, O Rishi, what thou feelest in thy heart, or what thy bows are for ?
Thou hast lived a life without seeing God;
Tell me to whom didst thou offer prayer.
If thou listeneth to truth, thou oughtest to subdue the five senses.
If thou lowereth only the fleshy body, the fleshy body will not save thee;
If thou maketh union with Shiva
Then only, O Rishi Mali will prayer avail thee.

The influence of Lalla is so clearly seen that if some one does not make it clear the identity of the poet in the beginning, anybody would be mistaking the whole beautiful piece as that by Lalleshwari. But this was not a mere carbon copy of Lalleshwari. The saint himself realised this great Truth after meditating on the great Almighty and then only shares his divine nectar with his beloved disciples.

It must be made categorically clear although there are references to Hindu God *Shiva*, or influence of *Vedanta* in the teaching of the saint, and it is equally true that he had a large number of Hindu devotees, followers, and disciples, the saint never changed his religion. That is out of question. At the same time his followers too stuck to their original faith. It was an ideal harmony. Scholars have particularly made note of this significant aspect of the powerful path finder. It has been observed "while Nurud Din was influenced by Lalla her influence did not make him a Hindu saint in the guise of a Muslim Rishi. His sayings show that he believed in the fundamental principles of Islam—the unity of God, the day of judgment and reward and punishment. He differed from other Kashmiri Sufis in ignoring orthodoxy, while still emphasizing the traditional Sufi path of devotion. To him not mere ritual observances but love, sincerity, humane outlook, and above all personal piety were the basis of religion."

To this list a very important aspect of the saint's message has inadvertently been missed. And that is purity. That is above every thing else. Both Lalla and Nand Rishi stress the need

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for purity of heart without which God realisation is not only difficult but impossible.

In his *History of Kashmir*, like Lawrence and Rafiqi, Bamzai also records the tremendous impact of the Shaikh on Kashmiris. He says

"Shaikh Nurud Din acquired enormous influence over the people of Kashmir and when he passed away at an advanced age, King Zain-Ul-Abidin himself was the chief mourner at his funeral. His grave at Tsrar Sharif is an object of pilgrimage, Kashmiris of all religions and communities flocking to it every year. The extent of the veneration in which his memory has been cherished may be gauged from the fact that nearly four centuries after his death, Atta Muhammad Khan, the Afghan Governor (1808—10) in order to win the sympathy and support of the people of Kashmir, struck coins in the name of Shaikh Nurud Din. No other saint, perhaps in human history, has ever had coins struck in his honour."

In his monumental well documented work on *Sufism in Kashmir*, Dr. AQ Rafiqi asserts, "Shaikh Nurud Din distinguished himself among all the Muslim saints of Kashmir. Jonaraja, the contemporary of the Shaikh, who rarely acknowledges the sanctity of any Muslim describes him as the greatest sage of the time. The Shaikh did not concern himself with propagating the faith of Islam. He gave himself to austere penances. For times he subsisted upon wild vegetables, later on he gave them up and sustained on one cup of milk daily. Finally in his last years he is said to have reduced his diet to water alone."

Dr. Rafiqi, giving details of the saint's passing away, records

"Shaikh Nurud Din died on 26 Ramzan, 842/12 March 1439, at the age of sixty-three. He was buried with almost royal pomp at the village of Chrar (twenty miles to the South-west of Srinagar), among the thousands of mourners was Sultan Zainul Abidin. The simplicity and the purity of Shaikh Nurud Din's life has greatly impressed the people of Kashmir, who entertain the highest veneration for the saint to this day. It was perhaps to give the expression to popular senti-

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ment that the Afghan Governor, Atta Mohammad Khan (early nineteenth century) struck coins in the name of Shaikh Nurud Din."

(*Sufism in Kashmir*, p. 148)

In his Valley of Kashmir. Lawrence also confirms the tremendous impact of the saint on whole of Kashmir.

(Lawrence, *Valley of Kashmir*, p. 288)

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Born in Rawalpindi in 1930, Dr. Vivek Bhattacharya was brought up in Delhi. He graduated in Economics (Honours) from St. Stephen's College, Delhi, in 1949 with a high rank. He was among the first group of Post graduate students from Delhi School of Economics from where he passed his M.A. in Economics. He conducted research in the same institution (Department of Business Management) and was among the first group of students to receive Ph.D., degree.

Dr. Bhattacharya is a prolific and versatile author with about thirty books to his credit.

Described as a scholar with "encyclopediaic knowledge" Dr. Bhattacharya has a lucid style of his own. He is known for his humble nature and modest demeanour.

His works on Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Tagore earned him laurels from great scholars like Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the former Philosopher - President of India.

Dr. Bhattacharya is an extremely delightful conversationist and has a charm of all round intellect.

Dr. Bhattacharya is now working on more Saints of India.

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